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The Amber Heart
and
Other Plays

Alfred C. Calmour.

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From The Author

With all good wishes

~~Dec~~ 1903:—

THE AMBER HEART

AND

OTHER PLAYS.

THE AMBER HEART

AND OTHER PLAYS.

BY

ALFRED C. CALMOUR.

PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION.

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PR4409
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1888

TO

ELLEN TERRY,

TRUEST OF FRIENDS,

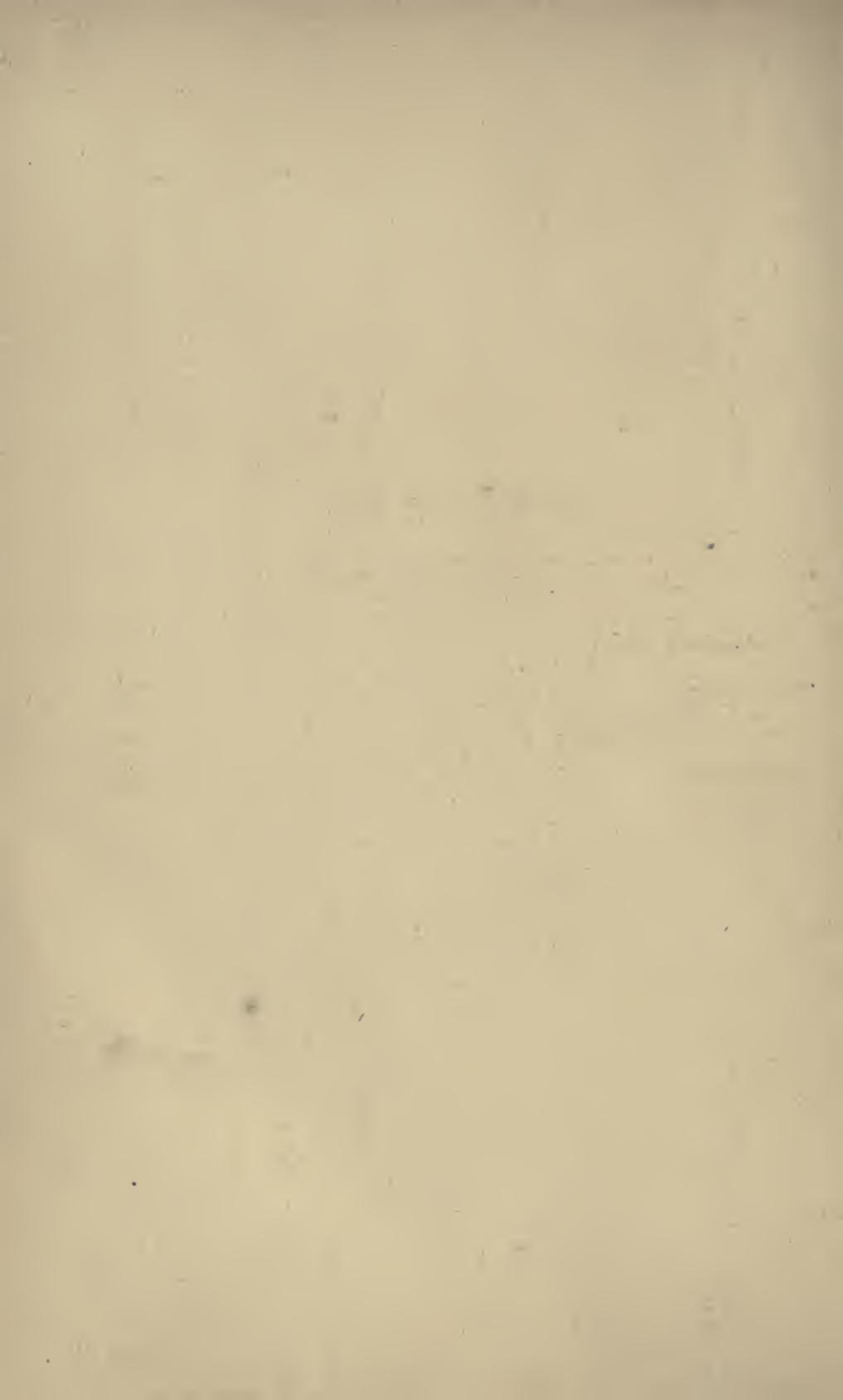
This Book is Dedicated

BY THE AUTHOR,

AS A MARK OF HIS REGARD AND ADMIRATION FOR HER MANY ESTIMABLE
QUALITIES AS A WOMAN AND HER GENIUS AS AN ACTRESS.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
THE AMBER HEART	I
ELVESTINE	67
CUPID'S MESSENGER	129
CROMWELL	159



THE AMBER HEART

A FANCY

IN THREE ACTS.

Characters.

SILVIO (*A Poet and Troubadour*).

GEOFFRY (*Lord of Stene*).

RANULF (*Duke of Andradel*).

SIR SIMON GAMBER.

CORANTO.

ELLALINE (*Niece to Ranulf*).

MIRABELLE (*His Daughter*.)

KATRONA (*Attached to the Duke's House*).

CESTA (*Maid to Mirabelle*).

SCENE—*The Castle of Ranulf.*

TO

R. K. HERVEY

AND

W. DAVENPORT ADAMS

This Play is Dedicated

AS A SLIGHT MARK OF GRATITUDE FOR THE SYMPATHY AND INTEREST

SHOWN BY THEM IN ITS COMPOSITION.

1886.

ACT I.

SCENE—*Room in the Castle.*

SILVIO discovered. *He plays a prelude, then sings, accompanying himself on the lute.*

Song.

THE wild rose in the hedge is dead,
And haws have turned from green to red ;
While squirrels house their Winter store,
And redbreasts hop about the door.
For Spring has changed to Summer prime,
And Summer passed to Autumn time.

And love is in the Autumn wind—
Hark, how it whispers to the reeds
As to the willows they unfold
Their passion for the marigold.

Hark, how it whispers to the reeds.

SIL. There is a sympathy in tender song
That saddens while it soothes ; as kindly words
Will bring the tears to ease a heart o'ercharged.

(Puts down the lute with a sigh.)

I strike a joyful note upon the lute,
 And in a self-created paradise
 Fancy I live enthronèd with my love ;
 Till ev'ry chord in wailing mournful strain
 Sweeps down the airy fabric of my dream,
 And I awake to doubt and misery.
 Oh, Ellaline, dear life of Beauty born—
 Sweetest embodiment of sunny Joy,
 Whose laughter takes grim Sorrow prisoner—
 Smile on my love, so I may be inspired
 To write such truths of thee, and of mankind,
 That all the world shall wonder at my verse ;
 And, wondering, worship !

(*Enter Sir SIMON GAMBER.*)

SIL. Sir Troubadour,
 I have been seeking you since early morn.
 By her I flatter with my love, I swear,
 Through glade and brake I've footed it so far
 That many a maid did enviously ask,
 When I declined to tarry and caress,
 'What lucky wench does sweet Sir Simon seek,
 So many miles from wooded Andradell ?'
 But, by the sex, why do you look so sad ?
 Has Ellaline been chary of her smiles ?

SIL. Sir Simon—

GAM. Tut, boy, 'tis all plain to me.
 I've traded in affection since my nurse

Bribed me to love her with such daily gifts
As comfits, kisses, and those candied sweets
That children most affect.

SIL. I doubt it not.

GAM. To know love's symptoms, suffer love yourself.
Be struck by Cupid's nimble shafts of flame
As I am now. Look well upon me, boy,
So that your verse may truthfully report
What outward workings show when men do love.
Mark well the sad distraction in my face ;
The eager eye that challenges regard ;
My pallid cheek ; this arm that restless seeks
To clasp with fond embrace the yielding waist
Of spritish Cesta——

SIL. In truth, Sir Simon,
Saving the wish to girdle Cesta's waist,
Which, in a man of nearly threescore years,
Sits like a fool's cap on a snowy head,
These signs speak more of hunger than of love.

GAM. For love I hunger, truly. Listen, boy.
Though gifted with a hundred rare conceits
Of phrase and form, I have no power to rhyme.
Nay, pause awhile ; the sum of all is this :
I would indite some verses to my love,
Some dainty, tripping, jingling, merry lines,
Which should make plain to her my qualities.

SIL. And you would have me fashion out this ode
In praise of your most estimable parts ?

GAM. Such, boy, was my desire. For your reward—

SIL. Nay, tempt me not, Sir Simon. My poor muse
Could not do justice to so brave a theme.
Besides, the way to win a woman's love—

GAM. Hold, hold, Sir Poet ! when you were in clouts,
For forty years I had been up and down
Testing each bait to trap a woman's heart.
Topaz and ruby, diamond and pearl,
And gifts of gold are fit enough for those
That do not boast the graces I possess.
But there, enough. For, see, like a young fawn,
Decked out by childish hands, comes Ellaline.
I will ask her to plead in my behalf. (*Goes to door.*)

SIL. (*aside*). Oh, lovely vision—beauteous bud of Spring—
Let my warm passion ope love's tender flow'r,
Which churlish Winter hath kept closed so long !

GAM. (*at door*). Ah, my sweet mistress, in good time you come
To join our plot against that wanton god
Who gambols to the music of men's sighs.

(*Enter ELLALINE with flowers about her.*)

ELLA. Good even, gentlemen. I come in time
To find my cousin Mirabelle was right.
She said, Sir Simon, you had not gone hence
To join my uncle Ranulf in the chase.
I've lost my wager, jesses, hawk, and bells.

GAM. Though you have lost, yet I will pay the fine.

ELLA. (*to Silvio*). Why, hark you now, here is a generous mood !

SIL. Sir Simon's gallantry is known to all.

ELLA. A scarlet hood, and bells with silver tongues—
So ran the wager.

GAM. The tongues shall be of gold,
If you will use your offices for me,
And praise my worth to Mirabelle's fair maid.

ELLA. (*laughing*). To giddy Cesta? Here is pretty sport!
I am to catalogue your rarest parts,
And like a crier in the market-place,
Ding out your praises? How shall I begin?

GAM. Begin by praising my most tender heart,
Which beats for her alone.

ELLA. Item, a heart,
A tender heart, which beats for her alone.
Proceed, Sir Knight.

GAM. Praise, then, my lusty age,
And goodly frame—my leg, that might have stood
As model for Apollo's, or that Greek's,
Who, all unarmed, the lightning once defied.

ELLA. Item, a leg—'twere better I said two.

GAM. Two handsome well-matched legs, finely proportioned.

ELLA. Item, two well-matched legs.

GAM. Finely proportioned.

ELLA. Then I will touch upon your winning smile,
Your disposition, full of boundless mirth,
Your courage, wisdom, and your wealth untold.

GAM. The jesses shall be yours, and golden bells.
I leave a worthy advocate behind
To plead in my behalf.

ELLA. I shall not fail.

GAM. Now I will go, and find this truant maid.

Sir Troubadour, I have no need of thee
To put my many graces into verse.
An angel pleads for me.

(*Exit.*)

SIL. (*aside*). Her voice in praise
Would make a hideous satyr seem most fair.

ELLA. (*laughing*). There struts the very soul of vanity.
Surely such blind conceit was never seen !

SIL. His folly turns old age into a scoff.

ELLA. Indeed 'tis so—and yet I must confess
It likes me to have merry sport with him.

SIL. All things give sport to thee.

ELLA. Would'st have me sad,
And vex the air with groans as sick folk do ?
When I was born, the fairy bloom was spread
O'er wood and meadow, and the sunny beams
Danced in the shadows to the hedge-bird's song.
I needs must laugh, or sadden, pine, and die !

SIL. He'd be a churl to grudge the lark its note,
Or rail against the scented breath of Spring.
If I did chide, 'twas but in envious mood
That all alike should share thy beauteous life.

ELLA. Then chide no more, but take thy sweet-voiced lute,
And play such laughing, mirthful, elfish strains
As shall make pale-faced Grief forget her woe,
And smile upon mankind. Come, now, begin.

SIL. I have no heart to play upon the lute ;
And merriment would sit but ill on me.

ELLA. Now, by the god of music and of song
(A fitting oath), some change hath come o'er thee !
Hast taken sickness from too long a fast ?
Coranto says ill humours should be fed,
And uncle Ranulf, who, indeed, should know,
Hath gravely stated that all manly ills
Spring from poor appetite and want of food.
You must eat heartily at supper-time.

SIL. If I could physic my distempered mind
By feasting on rich meats and ruddy wine,
The cure were quickly wrought ; but Ellaline,
My malady is deeply seated here ; (*Indicates his heart.*)
And for its ease I must leave Andradell.

ELLA. Leave Andradell ?

SIL. Aye, such is my resolve.
To-night I bid farewell to the good Duke ;
To-morrow—ere the drowsy swineherd moves
Tardy of foot across the glistening meads—
I shall have gone.

ELLA. Nay, nay, this is some jest !
Since Spring-time you have charmed us with your rhymes,
And made the woodlands musical with song.
Why, all the birds have wondered at your note,
Which harsh and tuneless made their sweetest strains ;
And even Echo which doth love to mock
Hath joyed to listen to your melody.
'Twere cruelty to go !

SIL. 'Twere death to stay.

ELLA. Are poets more susceptible than maids
To sickness and to pain? Can they from air
Take rank infection? Since I was a child,
And came to live with dear Coranto here,
I have, uncared for, walked from morn till fall,
In cloud and sunlight, and ne'er knew an ache.

SIL. I know no pain save that which comes unsought
To ev'ry man who loves a cherished life,
And finds his fevered worship all in vain.

ELLA. This is some sickness that I know not of.
Coranto is well skilled in medicine;
He will advise.

SIL. You do not understand.

ELLA. (*playfully*). This much, good Silvio, I do understand—
You purpose leaving us to-morrow morn.
That must not be; we cannot lose your songs.
If uncle's bounty will not keep you here,
I will augment it with a gift of mine.

SIL. To be near thee were rich enough reward,
And for a gift had I but thy sweet love—

ELLA. Alas, my Silvio, that I cannot give.

SIL. Then I must go from hence. At Gastrell's court
I may forget—

ELLA. We will not let thee go.
Here come Lord Geoffry and my wayward coz!

They'll join their prayers with mine to keep thee here.

SIL. 'Twere better for my peace that I depart.
The outspread feast gives little joy to him

Who, starving, lacks the pittance of a meal.
I will come to thee after supper bell,
And say farewell. Pray, not a word till then !

ELLA. I'll humour thee in this, for it may hap
The generous wine will change thy foolish whim.

SIL. (*passionately*). Thy love would change the current of my life ;
Give airy fancy to my grosser thoughts—(*Takes her hand*).

ELLA. This ecstasy doth show a fevered pulse ;
In sooth, Coranto must prescribe for thee,
And I will be thy nurse, good Silvio.

SIL. (*aside*). She is incapable of tender love,
Or sad regret would piteously plead,
And wake the mystic silence of her heart
To passioned eloquence. (*Goes off sighing*.)

ELLA. Why, what a sigh !
'Twas like the wailing of a tree in March
When with bare arms it wrestles with the wind.
I wonder what can ail—But, as I live,
If Mirabelle's flushed face and Geoffry's mien
Do truly speak, here is another storm.

(*Enter MIRABELLE and GEOFFRY*).

MIRA. (*as she enters*). When ice and snow are signs of summer's
heat,

And light is darkness, and the day the night,
Then, without question, I will take your word !

GEOF. You wrong me, Mirabelle, and, for a truth,
Your nature is too choleric and hot——

MIRA. And yours too like a vapour that doth hang
About the land in chill November-time !

ELLA. Alack-a-day, dear cousin, here are words
More suited to the temper of a hind
Than one of noble birth—what is amiss ?

GEOF. I tire of justly weighing every thought,
And giving reasons for my words and acts.

MIRA. You tire of me ?

ELLA. Nay, nay, I do protest.

GEOF. I've seen so many fashions that, perchance,
I tire of one.

MIRA. You hear the monster mock !
He hath outworn me. Like a testy child
He craves for a new toy ; but I'll not fret—
There are a hundred quite as brave as he !

GEOF. A thousand—nay, a million, if you will.

MIRA. I'll not be moved to passion, good my lord.

GEOF. 'Twere hard to move you to do aught but chide.

ELLA. I must make peace between you—come, be friends.

GEOF. If on her disposition you could graft
Some of your gentle nature, Ellaline,
Or, by example, make her less a shrew,
I would bestow on you such precious gifts
As queens might envy. But that wish were vain,
For wise Coranto hath taught me this saw—
'Who thinks by precept women folk to rule,
Knows not the sex, and proves himself a fool.' *(Exit.)*

MIRA. Call him back, cousin, I was but in jest.
Indeed, meant to give him no offence !

ELLA. Your voice was harsh, and men like not a scold.

MIRA. Dear Ellaline, speak fair in my behalf!

ELLA. You shall sit next him at the supper board,
And, in soft tones, confess you were at fault,
And I will warrant, ere the meal be o'er,
These clouds will melt like mist before the sun.

MIRA. I will confide my fears to you, dear coz.

ELLA. What foolish doubts hang now about your brain !
Hast conjured up some trouble since the morn ?
Imagination only should be wooed,
When, plumed with hope, it wings its airy flight
Through the sweet realms of happy phantasy.

MIRA. Nay, listen, Ellaline ; my fears are real.
Geoffry, whose heart was mine until to-day,
Hath been by reason or some fancied wrong
Turned from his loving way. Oh, dearest coz,
Go to him straight, and say how my fond heart
Yearns for his better thoughts.

ELLA. Nay, comfort thee.
Thy waywardness—let it not hap again—
Will surely be forgiven.

MIRA. Forgiven, aye ;
But will his love return ? Oh, Ellaline,
Were I to lose that, I should go distraught !

ELLA. I do not know this witchery called love,
Which runs like a distemper in the blood ;
Yet for all harmless life I have regard.
Friendship for youth, and reverence for age
And for the sick, a pity far more keen

Than many who will answer groan with groan—
It must be some disease which I am spared.

MIRA. Now I can see the cause of your bright life,
Which sorrow never dulls.

ELLA. What is the cause ?
Nay, answer me, I pray !

MIRA. 'Tis lack of heart,
Which, in a maiden, is, indeed, far worse
Than any sickness known beneath the sun.

ELLA. Yet I can feel, within my bosom here,
A tuneful throbbing that denies your words.

MIRA. A heartless woman may still have a heart.

ELLA. Does heartlessness mean freedom from all pain ?
You suffer, sigh and moan ; yet I am blessed
With boundless spirits, happiness, and health.
Love is a sickness, I am sure of that,
A common sickness to folk hereabout ;
For vain Sir Simon—our good Silvio too,
The giddy Cesta, and austere Katrona,
And even Geoffry, have all shown its mark.

MIRA. (*eagerly*). Has Geoffry spoken words of love to you ?

ELLA. Aye, truly, coz, and I did gently bear
With what I thought a strange infirmity.

MIRA. (*passionately*). Tis plain you are a roguish hypocrite,
And all your ignorance a mock and sham !—

ELLA. Nay, cousin dear—

MIRA. I will not hear a word !

(*Horn heard.*)

ELLA. Ah, here is uncle Ranulf from the chase,
He shall be judge between us !

MIRA. I'll not stay
To have my passion turned into a scoff.

ELLA. He will condole with thee, as I do now.

MIRA. Keep your condolence for that troubadour
Who draws his inspiration from your smiles ;
And, if your heart be capable of pain,
I'll wring it ere the moon be at its full. (Exit.)

ELLA. What a strange fancy hath o'ertaken her.
Her fiery spirit always did rebel
'Gainst gentle words ; but she was never thus.
Can these be symptoms of that grievous ill
Which hath afflicted her ?

(Enter RANULF.)

RAN. Sweet Ellaline——

ELLA. Ah, dearest uncle, welcome, welcome home !

RAN. (kissing her). Was not that Mirabelle went hence but now ?

ELLA. She parted from me but a moment since.

RAN. She should have tarried till I bade her go.
Although I ever dearly cherished her,
She hath of late been slack in her regard ;
And filial love is Nature's common debt,
Which every child should take delight to pay.

ELLA. Nay, uncle, I am sure dear Mirabelle
Has never wavered in her fond regard.
A maiden's life hath numberless demands ;
She has been busy with her pensioners.

RAN. Since you extenuate, I will not chide.

Who could resist so sweet a sorceress? (*Pats her cheek.*)

ELLA. Dear uncle, tell me this—

RAN. Well, merry one?

Would'st know what sport we had with bonny Midge?

ELLA. You shall recount all that at supper-time.

Now, uncle, I am curious to know,

What is that sad affection of the heart

Which men call love?

RAN. You simple little witch,

That you will learn before the wrinkles come.

Love, that right gaily stirs the feeble pulse,

Is like rich ruby wine, juicy and rare,

Which leaps along the veins, and, in mad sport,

Attacks the very stronghold of the heart,

And beats its warden down. But see who comes—

ELLA. Sir Simon, as I live,—and Cesta too.

RAN. We'll bait him for our pastime—smoke the fox.

ELLA. I vowed to paint his graces to the girl

When wind and tide should serve—I'll do it now.

RAN. It is an old fox, silvered in the chase.

See how he scents the danger from afar. (*Calls.*)

What ho, Sir Simon! Good Sir Simon, ho!

(Enter SIR SIMON, followed by CESTA.)

ELLA. (*as he enters*). Prithee, Sir Simon, we attend on thee.

GAM. 'Tis I do wait on thee, fair Ellaline.

This maid and I have come to—as it were—

To parley—Eh, my lord, not supping—Eh
I smell the roast——

RAN. You had far better feed
That wizened, hungry, lantern frame of thine,
Than play the lover to this comely wench.

CESTA. Pleasing your grace, Sir Simon hath to-day,
With youthful ardour, offered me his heart.

GAM. And you were cold as rime on Winter morns.

RAN. Your heat, Sir Simon, should have melted her.

GAM. (*to Ellaline*). Now, sweetheart, 'tis the very place and hour
To plead my cause.

ELLA. Remember my reward.
A scarlet hood and bells with silver tongues.

GAM. Aye, golden tongues, if you will straightway speak.

RAN. (*aside*). What mischief hath the merry jade on foot ?

CESTA. (*to RANULF*). By your good leave I will retire within.

(*Going*.)

RAN. What, part without a kiss—a fond embrace ?
Marry, Sir Simon, where's thy vaunted warmth ?

GAM. Nay, I will comfort her. (*Offers to kiss her*.)

CESTA. Away—away ;
I care not to be scrubbed !

RAN. Her answer, friend,
Is keener than the razor you have used.

GAM. The child is shy—no more. Come, pretty one——

CESTA. Away, I say, or I will cuff thee well ! (*RANULF laughs*).

ELLA. Nay, Cesta, ere you break Sir Simon's heart,
That tender heart which beats for you alone——

GAM. You hear that child—‘which beats for you alone.’

RAN. Disease and Death are courtly gentlemen,
And, for a maid, will surely waive their claim.

CESTA. Would you persuade me, madam, to yield up
My freedom and the joy of serving you?

ELLA. You should, at least, be fully made aware
Of all the graces, and the rarer parts,
Sir Simon doth possess.

GAM. Mark, Cesta, mark.

ELLA. First note his goodly frame and lusty age.

RAN. A goodly frame, scarce strong enough to bear
His weight of ill-spent years.

GAM. Peace, prithee, peace !

(*Aside*) Descant upon my leg—with maids ’tis all.

ELLA. Stand back, Sir Simon—now, a pace to right,
So I can show thy many graces off.

Now, Cesta, note his leg—his left leg, Cesta——

RAN. Hath he but one to stand on ?

ELLA. Why, that limb
Might for Apollo’s well indeed have stood,
Or his who dared the lightning to defy.

RAN. Indeed, he hath a look of Ajax now.

ELLA. Surely a smile like that would soften rocks.
Smile, good Sir Simon—Cesta, mark his smile.

CESTA. ’Tis such a smile as painters give to toads,
When, open-mouthed, they woo. (*All laugh.*)

GAM. Where learnt you thus
To mock a gentleman, my lady cat ?

ELLA. Nay, good Sir Simon, smile upon her still.

RAN. The toad would be an ox.

GAM. You pincushion,

I would have lifted you from servitude ! (Bell heard.)

CESTA. I much prefer, Sir Simon, to remain

In happy service. (Exit, with a curtsey.)

RAN. Simon, let us in.

The bell doth speak of supper, and, in truth,
I have an appetite for that same roast
Which you did smell but now. Come, take my arm,
And let us rail against the faithless sex.

ELLA. Sir Simon hath a forfeit yet to pay.

GAM. I will pay nought—thou wert as bad as she.
A pest upon you all ! I will not trust
The best of you again.

RAN. Come, Simon, come. (Exeunt.)

ELLA. (laughing). The poor wretch suffers from that malady
Which mocks at youth and makes a jest of age.
What can this passion be that thus affects
The judgment, health, and temper of mankind ?
Ah, hither comes Coranto, wise and good ;
I'll ask him to explain the cause of love.
Alas ! Katrona hangs upon his words
As if she would appease her appetite
By feasting on his store of precious thoughts.
I will hide here till she hath gone to sup.

(Retires behind tapestry hangings.)

(Enter CORANTO and KATRONA.)

COR. (as he enters). I do admit, Katrona, the rich fruit,
That has outlived the Summer's fiery heat
(A period akin to youth in maids),
Is far more toothsome than that plucked unripe.

KAT. Yet you are cold and backward in your love.

ELLA. (aside). They talk of love, I cannot choose but list.

COR. When, good Katrona, did I ever hint,
By word or sign, that I did hold thee dear?

KAT. Never by word or sign, for you are wise,
And hide the trap till you have caught the game.

ELLA. (aside). Methinks the game itself hath set the trap.

COR. Listen, Katrona, for I now confess
An admiration for your comeliness,
And will, indeed, to you so far admit,
That, were I free to act as I desire,
I would acquire the mellowed rosy fruit
Which all too tempting hangs within my grasp.

KAT. Since the mouth hungers, why not gather quick?

COR. My reason, chuck, is this. Dear Ellaline,
The precious charge deposited with me,
Claims all my watchful care.

ELLA. (aside). He speaks of me.

KAT. But why should she put gyves upon your choice?

COR. I was a jester at her mother's court,
And ere she died, so great her boundless trust,
She bade me watch the growth of her sweet child,

And gently train, as gard'ners do a flower
(A dainty flower that blossoms all alone),
Its budding life.

ELLA. (*aside*). That you have done, dear heart.

KAT. But Ellaline is now a woman grown,
And will take wings and fly from out the nest ;
Already loving eyes are fixed on her;
And when she loves——

COR. That she will never do.

But let us in—the Duke hath sat ere this.

KAT. I will not yield thee up so easily.
The Autumn still is young, and I will wait.

COR. The fruit will wither if it hang too long.
Come, let us go within.

(KATRONA *goes off*; CORANTO *is about to follow*.)

ELLA. Coranto. Hist——

COR. Who calls on me ? The voice is Ellaline's.

ELLA. (*emerging*). And to the voice I have a stronger claim
Than any that I know !

COR. You bonny ghost——

Where have you sprung from, and what do you here ?
Know you the Duke has gone within to sup ?

ELLA. To be absolved, one must confession make.
Now, dear Coranto, I will straight confess
That I was present at your interview
With stern Katrona, that ungathered fruit——

COR. Didst overhear the subject of our talk ?

ELLA. I could not help it, for you spoke of me.

COR. (*aside*). She did not catch the heart of our discourse,
Or, hearing, could not understand its drift.

ELLA. Coranto, I have sought you out to learn—
Knowing your wisdom, truth, and honesty—
Why I, alone, within these castle walls,
Am never troubled with those pains of love
Which so afflicteth all ?

COR. Dear child, 'tis known
To those who deeply study human kind,
That half our woes are seedlings of our will ;
Our disposition being so far our own
That we, by patience, can o'ermaster it.
The daily joy of your sweet, happy life
Springs from content.

ELLA. And can content so charm
That it will free us from all grief and pain ?

COR. Aye, dearest child, it can do that and more.
Content will set a beggar on a throne,
And make him ruler of a treasure-land
Far richer than that overswayed by kings !

ELLA. What wondrous power !

COR. Now listen, Ellaline.
Before I came to dwell at Malrebar,
I once was in the service of a lord,
Who bade me play the fool before his guests,
Dressed in an ass's skin, or else go starve.
I bade him wear the ass's skin himself,
Fit emblem of the folly stored within.

He drove me forth, and I was forced to live
On roots and berries till I won for friend
Cathaldus—a philosopher and sage.

ELLA. 'Twas he my dearest mother knew.

COR. The same.

ELLA. Prithee go on.

COR. Our daily food was bread ;
For drink, the running stream.

ELLA. What beggar's fare !

COR. Yet with this beggar's fare I was content,
Nay, happy, for Cathaldus taught me how
To love the beautiful, the rare, and true.
In summer we would roam the livelong day,
And wander o'er the fields, the woods, and cliffs.
What joy was ours, my dearest Ellaline !
The land, the sea, the boundless arch of blue
(Which makes men giddy when they think of it)
Served our desires, and in their myriad tongues,
Unknown to most, disclosed their secret thoughts.
All nature welcomed us to her brave counsels !
In winter, when the nights were long and drear,
We'd stay within and converse with the dead,
And pluck the fruit that countless centuries
Had ripened in the minds of wisest men.
Astrologers would share their dreams with us,
And pleasure us with tales of starry lore ;
Judges at our behest would quote the law,
Proving when such an act was fixed by precedent ;

While poets, the true prophets in the land,
Would sing to us in sweetest melody.
None could have gauged the rich content within
By looking on our show of poverty.

ELLA. Since you, in knowledge, found this happiness,
So I would learn, Coranto, for mine ease,
More about love, its scope for good and ill.
What is this sickness? Is its power so great
That it can put restraint upon the gay,
Make slaves of freemen, and demand its due
From prince and peasant equally alike?

COR. You have been dowered with a priceless gift,
Yet, like the blessed sunlight to the blind,
You cannot estimate its precious worth.
This love which you would know is deadlier far
Than hooded nightshade, or the maddened bite
Of a she-wolf that hunger hath assailed.
Envy and Hate, and murd'rous Jealousy,
Spectral attendants, follow in its course.
All other ailments cease when we are dead,
But this will quicken in another's breast;
And love, long hid, will blossom forth anew,
Its flower, regret; repentance, its sole fruit.
In every heart the poisoned seed is sown—

ELLA. If that be so, how comes it I am free?
I have a heart; I feel it beating here.
I'm sure content is not the only cause
Why love hath passed me by.

COR.

I will not lie.

At first I thought to hide the simple truth,
And let you live in blissful ignorance
By making sweet content the amulet
Which kept your heart from pain.

ELLA.

Then 'tis not so !

COR. Dear child, the time hath come when you should learn
The cause of your bright, happy, joyous life,
So that you set a value on the charm
Which else might seem a toy devoid of worth.

ELLA. (*laughing*). Bear I, like fairies, then, a charmèd life ?

COR. Listen, fond one. A few words will suffice
To tell you the plain truth.

ELLA. (*with joyous action*). A sprite, an elf ;
Yet I am bound to earth ! Prithee, go on.

COR. Some women, when they love, yield up their lives
To a base slave, who wearies in a year.
So with your mother ; ere she had been wed
A score months, her treacherous lord had fled
From Malrebar. This blow struck at her heart,
And she was like to die, aye, would have died,
Had not Cathaldus, whose advice I sought,
Entrusted to my care an amulet,
*Which had the power to banish from her heart
The pangs of love, and, from her life, all grief,
Making the past but as a troubled dream.*

ELLA. And this hath kept me with a merry heart,
Making my life a dream of happiness !

COR. Aye, dearest Ellaline, indeed 'tis so.

ELLA. What is the charm that holds such wondrous power ?
Is it my ebon casket ; or, maybe,
The golden shield, all richly overlaid
With pearls and rubies, sways my destiny ?

COR. Nay, 'tis the little heart about your neck.

ELLA. This heart of amber ; what, this worthless toy
Which I have only worn to cast reproach
On Mirabelle for wearing such rich gawds ?
(*Laughing*) Is this the wondrous charm that keeps me free
From those love-pains which other women feel ?

COR. Aye, Ellaline, its power is masterful.

ELLA. And if I were to lose or cast it off,
Should I then love as men and women do ?

COR. In good sooth, aye.

ELLA. And cousin Mirabelle
Could not then say I was without a heart,
Or chide me for my want of sympathy ?

COR. Has she done this ?

ELLA. Yes, and good Silvio too.
But they shall chide no more.

COR. . . . What would you do ?

ELLA. Challenge the merit of this wondrous heart,
And see if, in its cloudy shape, there be
A charm at all.

COR. Nay, nay, I do entreat !

ELLA. (*with a laugh as she goes to the window*).
You said, the daily joy of my sweet life
Sprang from content. I have my doubts of thee !

COR. Hold, hold your hand !

ELLA. (*laughing as she throws the heart out of the window*).

’Tis gone into the lake :

See how the water moves in fairy rings !

COR. My child, you’ve lost the dearest thing in life,

Unless a miracle can bring it back !

(*Exit.*)

ELLA. A little heart scarce worth a silver piece

To bear so great a charm—it cannot be !

It is an idle tale to frighten me.

And yet—and yet I noted in his voice

A tone of heavy grief all strange to me.

Can it be true that I have cast away

The precious guardian of my happiness ?

If it be so, I shall awake betimes

To find I love as other women do.

(*Enter SILVIO.*)

SIL. (*aside*). She’s here alone. Now I will say farewell.

ELLA. Good Silvio, art sent to seek me out ?

I have played truant from the supper board.

SIL. The time hath come, dear, gentle Ellaline,

When I must say farewell.

ELLA. Farewell ! Nay, nay,

You do not mean it ! This is but a test,

To try what store I put upon your verse.

SIL. Ere night’s closed lids have opened on the dawn

I shall have said adieu to Andradell

For evermore.

ELLA. The time was, Silvio,

When you would save from pain the meanest thing :
 Now you are cruel to those who should be dear.

SIL. There is no dearer thing on earth than thou !
 All other beauties, Ellaline, are poor
 Beside thy loveliness. (*Music is heard within.*)

ELLA. Art speaking truly ?

SIL. Yes, on my soul, which I would freely give
 For thy fond love !

ELLA. Is it so precious, then,
 This love of mine ?

SIL. Aye, dearest Ellaline,
 More precious than the light which gives glad life
 To tender flowers ; for, were I stricken blind,
 With thee I should be in a paradise !

ELLA. Then go not from me, Silvio.

SIL. You love me ?
 (*Takes her hand.*)

ELLA. I know not ; but I feel within my heart
 A sweet joy hitherto unknown to me.
 I seem to have awakened from a dream
 To a new life of speechless happiness.
 I know I'm Ellaline—this is my hand,
 And yet I never trembled so before,
 Nor felt such wild delicious ecstasy.

SIL. These are the signs of love, my dearest one.
 And, as the sun pales all before its fire,
 So love makes faint the sweetest rhapsody.
 Entwine your arms about me, Ellaline,

That I may know this is not all a dream.

(*Takes her in his arms.*) What joy to hold you close
within mine arms,

To hear your heart with rapture sing aloud,
'I love you, love you, love you, Silvio !'

ELLA. If it be love never to wish to part
From him who raises in my panting breast
Such fond delight, then I do love thee well.

(*He kisses her.*)

The world has passed away, and, in its place,
I see a fairy realm, all rainbow-hued ;
And we are there together, dearest one.
Nay, do not speak, I know it is a dream,
Let me dream on. (*She folds her arms round SILVIO,*
resting her head on his shoulder, as enter CORANTO.)

COR. (*aside*). Too late ; I come too late !

ACT II.

A MONTH AFTER.

SET SCENE—*A Beautiful Garden near the Castle.*

CORANTO and KATRONA *discovered.*

KAT. What says the song, Coranto ? Why in truth,
‘ My lord and lady, maid and hind,
And ev’ry bird, and beast of kind,
Will turn to love, should they be wooed
When Cupid’s in a pliant mood.’

COR. There’s reason in the rhyme, but yet, dear soul,
No word of wedlock caught my watchful ear.
Sweet love is universal. See yon fly,
That sports in giddy circles round and round
Its fairy kin ; now hither, thither now,
Kissing everywhere from morn till e’en.
In chase and glade are herds of dappled deer ;
They love, and are most faithful to their choice.
The snowy-breasted bird, that restless flits
Upon the bosom of the lake, loves too,

And for a season will devote its life
To the fond partner of its sedgy nest.

KAT. And I was once beloved by thee, Coranto.

COR. I have, Katrona, still a deep regard
For that inviting buxom comely form.
But then to wed—that were to forge a chain
Which could not be so lightly shaken off
As drops of water from the swallow's wing.

KAT. 'Tis not a month since you confessed to me
An admiration warmer than regard ;
A month since Ellaline, the only bar
To my advance, Coranto, in your love,
Gave all her young heart to the troubadour,
And you have tired.

COR. Not so, my fairest one,
My love is evergreen.

KAT. Nay, you have tired ;
You do not fondle as, indeed, you used,
Nor pat my cheek ; nor call me your own child.

COR. (*patting her cheek*). There, rest content, I'll father you at once.
If like a timorous steed I shy somewhat
At the sunk fence of wedlock ; still, in time—

KAT. If wedlock be a sunken fence to you,
Then why not boldly take it at a leap ?

COR. I have my fears—

KAT. Coranto, so I thought.

COR. Nay, not of thee, but of that troubadour,
Whose constancy to Ellaline I doubt.

KAT. Ah ! there, dear heart, I, too, have had my fears.
Yet he hath won the good Duke's free consent,
And cannot so have cooled in four short weeks
That all his fire is quenched.

COR. He is a poet,
Full selfish in his verse, and fanciful
As women when they bear unto their lords
An image of themselves. I have watched close,
And noted, to my grief, that he hath fed
Upon her beauty till the joy hath palled.

KAT. Then, dear Coranto, is the proverb true,
'A poet's love will scarce outlive a day.'

COR. I have of late met him in yonder woods
With Mirabelle, in closest conference ;
And, as they passed, methought she wore a smile ;
A mocking smile—such as you women wear
When you pretend to love what you would kill.

KAT. Nay, nay, Coranto, women are most true,
Unless in their affections they are crossed.

COR. What motive can she have to rudely wake
Dear Ellaline from her bright dream of love ?
The child hath ever been most kind to her.

KAT. Your poet is to blame.

COR. Upon her face
A wistful tenderness hath lately sat,
As if her spirit wrestled with her fears.
If he be false 'twill break her gentle heart.

KAT. We women are alike—foolish and fond,

So have a care, Coranto ! Have a care—
 COR. Sir Simon has returned. See, by his side,
 How Cesta tosses up her pretty head.
 KAT. The flaunting hussy hath no sense of shame,
 Or she would not go gadding all alone
 In open day.
 COR. 'Twere better day than night !
 For night air is infectious to young maids,
 And, mushroom like, may ripen in their hearts
 Most dangerous desires.

(Enter CESTA and GAMBER.)

GAM. (as he enters). Say I am wrong,
 And sweet, it shall be so.
 CESTA. When were you right
 Sir Simon——
 GAM. Nay, nay, call me Simon, sweet,
 Your doting Simon.
 COR. (aside to KATRONA). A doting dotard sure.
 (Aloud) Well, now Sir Simon, what is this dispute ?
 GAM. Coranto, you shall be our arbiter.
 CESTA. I say my lady was not habited
 In hat and plume, when she a-hawking went.
 GAM. But different sport must needs, my bonny sweet,
 Be differently attired. When I go hunting
 I don my russet cloak ; but when with thee
 I wear my crimson hose and pointed shoes.
 COR. Sir Simon's right ; all seasons bring their change.

The clucking goose at yuletide wears the buff
In honour of the time and company.

KAT. A goose is still a goose, whate'er it wear.

GAM. Ah ! madam, you are wise, and can at once
Convince this wayward maid that Mirabelle
Was so attired when she with Silvio walked.

COR. With Silvio ! Was he her escort, then ?

CESTA. In that we are agreed.

GAM. (to CORANTO). Where's Ellaline ?
If she be still within, all doubts must cease.
Coranto, what say you ?

COR. She is within.

GAM. What said I, Cesta ? Now, confess you're wrong.

CESTA. Nay, right or wrong, you always are at fault.

COR. (aside to KATRONA).

Again with Mirabelle ; this but confirms
What I have noted with a trembling fear.

KAT. (aside). Alas, Coranto, men are changeful things.

GAM. Ah, hither comes Lord Geoffry. Cesta, mark
How I will rouse him to a jealous mood.

CESTA. Best have a care.

GAM. There's famous sport toward.

(Enter GEOFFRY.)

GEOF. Coranto, I am glad to find you here.

I should have sought you——

COR. Then we are well met.

GAM. I had a hope, my lord, your search was made
For Mirabelle, that dainty peerless queen ;
Then might my services have been of use.

GEOF. I thank you, sir, for your most kind intent.

GAM. Nay, you are very welcome ; and, i' faith,
I thought at first 'twas you that I espied
So close engaged with her in Birdell woods,
Pulling the oxslip from its mossy bed.

COR. Sir Simon suffers from a mocking eye,
That, will-o'-wisp-like, leads him all astray.

GAM. Nay, I can see as far through a yew hedge
As any man or woman hereabout.
It was young Silvio—that I will swear.
Sweet Cesta saw him too.

CESTA. Nay, I saw naught.

GEOF. Now, by my soul, what is this all to me !
If Orpheus teach Eurydice to sin
I am untouched !

KAT. (to CESTA). Come, Cesta, let us in.

GAM. Of course—I meant not that.

GEOF. Then what didst mean ?
Wert not so bold I would pluck out thy sting,
And see what poison's hid !

COR. Nay, my lord, nay.
Sir Simon loves a jest.

GEOF. Then for his life
Let him not jest with me !

GAM. (aside). I will within,
Now I have set the spark in a full blaze.
(Aloud) My lord, I will not notice your rough words.
When men are angry, then their passion speaks

And not their hearts. My love is still with you,
And with you all.

(*Exit.*)

KAT. Come, Cesta, let's within.

(*To CORANTO.*) Upon the subject of our last discourse
We will talk further.

COR. When the time shall serve.

KAT. Come, Cesta, come !

CESTA. Madam, I wait on thee. (*Exeunt.*)

COR. You have sought me—

GEOF. There is no need to say
Why I have sought your counsel and advice ;
This aged prattler hath made known my fears
To all the world.

COR. 'Tis then as I suspect.

GEOF. Dost think, Coranto—look up, man, and speak—
Dost think this singer, poet, troubadour,
Whate'er you will, hath cozened Mirabelle ?

COR. I'm thinking of a flower but half unclosed,
Whose tender life will wither on its stem
Long ere its heart has opened to the sun.

GEOF. You mean poor Ellaline.

COR. She fills my thoughts.
I love her as a father loves that child
Whose angel face brings back to his fond gaze
The cherished helpmate of a troubled life,
Who has gone on a little way before
To greet his coming.

GEOF. If he play her false
I'll make her quarrel and mine own as one.

COR. You must not act upon your fears alone.

GEOF. Till I'm assured, assure yourself of this,
My sword will sleep uneasy in its sheath.

When I have once confirmed what I suspect,
I promise you the reckoning shall be short.

COR. Then be advised ; till that be done, my lord,
Let not false rumours move you to rash deeds !
For 'tis well known—would it were heeded more—
When truth and falsehood in the scale are weighed
The lightest breath of slander will bear down
The even balance—make it kick the beam.
A particle, not larger than the mote
That on a sunbeam pendulously swings,
Will the bare eye of Judgment so distort
That truth shall seem as falsehood—falsehood, truth.

GEOF. Falsehood or truth may point me out the way
Which, heart and soul, I am aflame to tread.

COR. No more, I pray, for here comes Ellaline ;
I would not, good my lord, that she should think
We did discourse of her.

GEOF. I will be gone
When I have greeted her. Another's grief
Will, in a measure, soothe more than kind words.

(Enter ELLALINE. *She is somewhat changed in
appearance since last Act.*)

ELLA. (with a smile). Why, my Lord Geoffry, not a-hawking
gone ?

The day is fair, and Queen and Prince would joy
 To sail in hot pursuit before the wind ;
 Braving the cloudy squadrons in their flight.
 Have you outworn the sport ?

GEOF. Nay, Ellaline.

I have been busy hunting to and fro,
 Hoping to find——(*Aside*) Her name sticks in my throat.

ELLA. (*aside*). Hunting for her who wanders with my love.

COR. (*aside*). They pause in fear, as if their thoughts were one.

GEOF. Ah, yonder walks the Duke. My search is o'er.
 My loving duty to you, Ellaline.

ELLA. And mine to you. (*Exit GEOFFRY.*)

(*Aside*) 'Twas Mirabelle he sought,
 Yet he refrained from speaking out her name,
 As if he knew the cause of all my grief.
 Can he have marked beneath my words and smiles
 The sadness at my heart ?

COR. Quite lost in thought ?

ELLA. A silly mood, Coranto, which forgive.

COR. May I ne'er know forgiveness for my sins,
 If I do not from this unhappy state

Win you, dear Ellaline, to mirth and song !

ELLA. Nay, good Coranto, you mistake me quite ;
 I am as happy a I e'er can hope
 To be, where all is pain.

COR. We'll have no pain !

The day shall pass in merriment and joy,
 For we will plot together 'gainst the time,

And make each hour so envious of the last
That night shall be long coming ; and the dawn,
All eager to begin the round of sport,
Shall lightly tread upon the heels of night
To warn it of the day.

ELLA. And shall my love,

Dear Silvio, join in our gladsome games ?
I could not leave him sadly all alone
To speed the time. He must be chief in this,
Or he would think I had in my regard
Grown cold and careless—maybe, tired of him,
And he might slacken in his love for me,
And that would break—— (*Shows signs of emotion.*)

COR. (*aside*). I will not note her grief.

(*Aloud*) He shall join too. Nay, dear one, do not doubt.

ELLA. Dost think I doubt, then, dearest Silvio ?

To doubt were just to die—and I am gay
And feverish to live my life in full.

Nay, do not look so sadly. I can laugh
As loud as any maiden loved as I. (*Gives a sob.*)

COR. And thou art loved right well

ELLA. (*eagerly*). Dost think so truly ?

Nay, nay ! I meant not that.

COR. I did not heed.

My thoughts were framing endless joys for thee.
We'll take long walks through fields of twinkling corn,
And watch the poppies nod themselves to sleep ;
We'll hunt, we'll hawk, and fish upon the lake ;

And snare wild fowl upon the rushy land
Beyond the wood, which we have passed so oft.
To-morrow, fond one, we will live again
The life we used.

ELLA. (*with a sigh*). Ah, that can never be.
But do not think I would, e'en if I could.
To be beloved gives a far greater joy
Than all beside, and I am loved right well.
You said so, dear ; those were your very words,
And it is true, for you would not speak false.

COR. Remember, sweet, to-morrow we must rise
To welcome in the sun ; and, Ellaline,
Long ere the myriad flowers have drunk their fill,
We will take boat and row upon the lake.

ELLA. Upon the lake, where lies the little heart
That I flung idly from me. It may hap,
Coranto, if I gaze into the depths,
I shall esp'y it in its weedy bed ;
And, though I would not have it for my own,
Yet to look on it once might comfort me.

COR. To-morrow, then, we'll start at early morn
With dispositions joyful as the day.

ELLA. And Silvio will join us, I am sure.
He knows the ferny pathways through the wood,
And he would love to come.

COR. To-morrow, then.

ELLA. I shall not soundly sleep, lest I be late,
For I do long, Coranto, to be gone.

COR. To-day, dear Ellaline, will soon have sped.
At dawn I will knock three times at your door.

ELLA. Knock till I answer, then I will arise
For fear I sleep again.

COR. Yes, fondest one.

(*Aside*) Her heart yearns for the charm. I'd give my life

To place it once again around her neck,
So that she ne'er might know the misery
Of dearly loving, when no more beloved.

(*Exit.*)

ELLA. How oft at sunset I have walked alone,
Where the tall rushes dip into the lake ;
And, then, methought, they murmured as I passed,
'The little heart is ours, and you have grief ;
Come, Ellaline, and sleep beside it here,
Where all is endless happiness and peace——',
And I have wept aloud, not knowing why :
And now I hear, although I try to smile,
The murmur of the rush repeating still,
'The little heart is ours, and you have grief ;'
But I'll not heed it, for within a month
My love could not so change. Mine is the fault
If he hath lately drawn himself apart.
I should have traced the course of every wish,
And met it midway. If he no longer
Kiss me at morn or dewy eventide,
It is because he's busy in his verse,
Not that he loves me less. I hear his step.

Yes, he is coming—but I will not show
A sign of pain. I'll greet him with a smile,
And I will twine my arms about his neck,
And tell him of my love. He's not alone. (*Looks off.*)
Again with her. My heart sinks in my breast.

(*Enter SILVIO and MIRABELLE.*)

MIRA. (*to SILVIO, as she enters.*) Then meet me presently.

SIL. I will not fail.

ELLA. My latest thoughts, dear Silvio, were of thee.
I am right glad you're come.

SIL. And 'tis well said.
A frosty welcome on a summer's day
Is out of season, sure.

MIRA. Then, Ellaline,
I doubt not you would wish to be alone
With Silvio.

SIL. Nay, Mirabelle, there's naught
Between us that you cannot hear.

MIRA. The child
Hath got some fairy tale to tell—some dream
Which she would wish to pour into thine ear.
Is it not so, my sweet?

ELLA. I have no wish,
Save that to please in word, and thought, and act,
The one I love the best.

MIRA. 'And that, dear coz,
Is Silvio. (*To SILVIO*) Why, you should bend the knee,

And make a fair reply. Sir Poet, come—
Flourish your hand, and place it on your heart,
And swear eternal constancy and love.
The child is pining for some sugared speech.

ELLA. Beneath the sugar, poison often lurks ;
Sweet words may be a mantle, Mirabelle,
To cloak a treacherous act.

SIL. Coranto's thought.
The fellow is a monument of wit.

MIRA. Say rather folly.

SIL. Folly and wit are kin.

ELLA. Coranto's wisdom is as infinite
As his unselfish love and charity.
He does not fawn and, dog-like, lick the hand,
Or say soft things with hatred at his heart ;
His nature is too open, brave, and true.
Were all men such as he, a woman's life
Would ne'er know grief or pain.

MIRA. Do you know grief ?
But then, dear Ellaline, that cannot be,
For you do lack a heart—nay, do not storm,
Or fly into a rage of angry words,
Your pretty face should always know repose.

ELLA. (*aside*). Her words stab deep, but I will not betray
The anguish that I feel.

MIRA. Now I'll away,
And leave you two alone.

SIL. Be not gone long.

MIRA. Good Silvio, list patiently I beg,
And comfort her fond heart, which only beats
To please in word, and thought, and ev'ry act,
The one she loves the best. (*Exit with a light laugh.*)

ELLA. (*aside*). I'll speak out now.

SIL. I prithee, Ellaline, take not to heart
What Mirabelle hath said. She meant no harm ;
Her mood was merry ; that is all, I vow.

ELLA. Dear love, her words fell idly on mine ear,
I have forgot the import of her speech ;
My thoughts are all of thee, my Silvio.

SIL. Hast aught to say to me, before I go
To doff my hawking suit ?

ELLA. Wilt tarry here ? (*He sits with a sigh of impatience.*)
Nay, not so far away—sit by my side—
For I have much to tell you, dearest heart,
And much to question. Sooth, you must not frown ;
I want to see a smile. Give me your hand ;
I shall take courage to speak all my thoughts
If it be clasped in mine. (*Takes his hand.*)

SIL. The time is short
Before I must away, so dally not.
What is it you would say ?

ELLA. My heart is full.
Before you came I said it to myself
A score of times, and I felt such reproach—
Smile on me dear, and then I shall be brave ;
I know I'm foolish, but I love you well,

And if I have not shown my fond regard,
Or gladdened you as, dearest, you deserve,
The fault was all my own ; and now I want
You just to bear with me. I've been remiss,
And did not watch your comfort as I ought.

SIL. Nay, nay, you did right well.

ELLA. I will do, love ;

For I will dwell upon each word and look,
And learn to be your hand, and eye, and ear,
So that your thoughts may all be in your verse ;
And we will walk together as we used,
Beneath the willows. Dost remember, love,
How we would sit for hours beside the lake ;
And you would sing to me, or read your rhymes,
While I, all filled with wonderment and joy,
Would list in dreamful silence ?

SIL. You listen well.

That quality you have. Still, one soon tires
Of approbation silently expressed.
Coranto, too, hath often proved to me,
A still tongue masks more ignorance than wit.

ELLA. I will not so offend you, dearest one,
When you recount the work that now is ripe ;
I will applaud right heartily and well.
But when shall we go forth as we were wont ?
To-morrow, dear ? I shall be up betimes
At break of day Coranto will arise,
And he hath promised to awaken me.

Wilt join us then?—Nay, turn not from me, love—
The next day we will tread the ferny paths,
Or the day after, dearest—when you will,
So it be soon.

ELLA. There is a strange fear growing in my heart,
Which I would not believe.

SIL. Come, let's within.
ELLA. I will not doubt you, dearest, though each sign
Were ten times plainer to my sight and sense
Than it is now. I would not wrong you so,
Believing you have cooled in your regard.
I know I have not loved you as I should,
But—why dost turn away, and hang your head?
My fears cannot be true !

SIL. Nay, nay, be calm.

ELLA. Speak all that's next your heart. I will be calm,
Whate'er you say; I will not chide or frown.

SIL. I dare not try to justify my act ;
I would not if I could. Look not so cold
And proud.

ELLA. Go on. I wait. Go on.

SIL. Unbend,
And be yourself, I pray.

ELLA. I listen still

For words that do not come. Go on, I beg.

SIL. When first mine eyes took light and love from thine,
I worship'd thee as man ne'er worship'd saint.

Mine was a passion that consumed my soul—

I would have gladly parted with my life

To pleasure thee! But you turned not to love,

And all my verse was empty, lifeless, poor;

But when I felt your arms about my neck,

And knew your heart responded throb for throb,

I bent my soul to work, and half achieved

That which was dearer unto me than all!

Out of your love my inspiration grew,

Until—

ELLA. Nay, say no more, the rest is clear.

SIL. I cannot bid my heart beat fast at will
Whenever you draw near. Love comes and goes,
And man is not its master but its slave.

I tried to love you faithfully and well—

ELLA. I do not chide, or utter one reproach,
And yet I understand you all too well.
Your love has gone out unto Mirabelle.

SIL. I said not that—

ELLA. She now inspires your verse,
And by her sympathy and kindly words,
Helps to build up your monument to fame.
I pray, and ever will, that she succeed
Where I have only tried.

SIL.

Come, Ellaline.

ELLA. Nay, leave me here, I fain would be alone.
She will be waiting for you—keep her not.
I prithee leave me now. I am right glad
That you are happy, dear—right glad—right glad ;
And my fond heart is full, too full for words.

SIL. Then you forgive ?

ELLA. There's nought, dear, to forgive.
Now go to her, for I would be alone.
Yet, ere you go, I would you kissed me once.

SIL. With all my heart.

ELLA. Just once upon the brow.

SIL. (*kissing her*). 'Tis icy cold.

ELLA. Now get thee quick within,
And tell her I am happy she is loved.

SIL. Come thou.

ELLA. I will sit here awhile and think.
Do not heed me. I'm happy. Get thee in.

SIL. (*aside*). Her smile is far more piteous than tears.
Were not my verse my life, I would forswear
All that I now have said to give her peace.
Were not my verse my life. (Exit.)

ELLA. Methought it said,
'The little heart is ours, and you have grief ;
And you have grief.' But it was false—all false
I'm very happy, for I told him so ;
And yet the tears will come. Am I awake,
Or is this all a dream ? Come, Ellaline,

Bestir yourself ; get up. My voice is strange.
I know not who I am. I seem to be
Some poor heartbroken wretch whom I have met
In sleep. If I look round I may awake.
This is the garden that I know so well ;
The old dial where I've daily marked the hour
When he, my love, would come ; my love, whose love—
Oh, misery, the truth breaks in on me,
I am no more beloved by Silvio !
He was beside me here, and coldly said—
The words ring in mine ears—‘ Love comes and goes,
And man is not its master but its slave ;’
And then he spoke of Mirabelle, and I—
Oh, mother, mother, I am punished now,
For casting your sweet gift into the lake !
My heart is broken, and I never more
Shall know the joy of peaceful happiness.

(*Enter MIRABELLE.*)

MIRA. Was Silvio unkind ? Poor chick, take heart.
ELLA. False-hearted woman, dare you mock and gibe,
When all my grief springs from your perfidy !
MIRA. Nay, pet, what have I done to anger you ?
ELLA. The tiger-cat is not more merciless !
The pois'rous rattle-snake is kinder far,
For that gives out a warning ere it strikes ;
But you mask close behind a smiling face

The deadly hate you bear !

MIRA. I bear no hate.

You are excited, child. What have I done ?

ELLA. You've snatched from me the one I dearly loved.

Like a base thief you've stolen his regard,
When it was all my own !

MIRA. A month ago

You dallied with my lord.

ELLA. 'Tis false ! 'Tis false !

MIRA. I vowed if your heart could feel grief or pain,

I'd wring it ere the moon was at its full.

You took my love, and I, to win him back,
Played with this troubadour—your Silvio.

'Twas life for life ; my love for yours.

ELLA. Take him !

Enjoy your triumph, if your venom'd heart
Can find delight in misery and grief.

I yield him all to you ; wear him at will ;

But if you suffer not as do the damned
When they in life have outraged ev'ry law,
Then there is neither justice for the wronged,
Nor punishment for crime !

MIRA. Art crazy turned ?

ELLA. Yes, I am mad, but all my woes are gone ;
I see a way to endless rest and peace ;
I'll lay me down beside the precious heart
That I have lost. The rushes call on me.

I come—I come ! My grief will soon be o'er.
Tell him I've gone to pray for his success.
They call on me again. Farewell, farewell,
I must not stay. I come, sweetheart, I come !

(*Laughs hysterically, as she runs off.*)

ACT III.

THE DAWN OF THE NEXT DAY.

SCENE—*As in Act I.*

Enter RANULF, SIR SIMON GAMBER, and LORD GEOFFRY.

RAN. (*as he enters*). Through her closed lattice shone no beacon
light

To greet us with the tidings; she hath come
From her long pilgrimage.

GEOF. - Poor Ellaline !

GAM. The child was merry, and I loved her well.

RAN. She was beloved by ev'ry living thing !

Aye, ev'ry hedge and copse and blade of grass
Was smiling fond, and seemed to know her step.
The cedars in the wood, where I made search
For dearest Ellaline, bewailed her loss,
And, as I passed beneath, the big drops fell,
As if they wept.

GEOF. And well indeed they might :
For at her birth all Nature took delight,
And beauteous lives in emulation tried
To give her each perfection of its kind.

GAM. And by the woman I most dearly love,
I'll search until I find her—live or dead.

RAN. Death would not dare to grip her loving heart
With his cold fleshless hand. She shall be found.

GEOF. Since yestere'en Coranto hath been out,
And still he searcheth up and down the lake.

RAN. We will renew our search at break of day.
I will go see fresh horses are led out,
So that we start with all the speed we may. (*Exit.*)

GAM. A ride at daybreak o'er the dewy grass
Produceth ague, and though lusty framed,
Yet I must have a care.

GEOF. Then stay at home.

GAM. What ! Stay within, while manhood calls aloud,
'Get thee out, Simon—Simon, lead the way !'
Nay, I would swim a league upon the lake,
Braving its weedy dangers, if I thought
To find dear Ellaline. A pest, I say,
Upon the troubadour ! Methinks that he,
Good Geoffry, is the cause of this turmoil.

GEOF. By Heaven, I wait but to encounter him
To make him answer for his treachery !
I'll give him scope to prove if he, in fence,
Is half as skilful as he seems to be
In winning maidens' hearts.

GAM. Were I not loved
With such devotion, by my very soul,
He would have tempted Cesta from my side.

Had he done so, I would have spitted him
With less remorse than a plucked Guinea-hen.

GEOF. I'll not waste words when we are face to face—
By Heav'n, my sword shall speak with fiery tongue !

(Enter CESTA followed by KATRONA.)

GAM. (to CESTA). Ah, sweetest one, art come to welcome us ?

KAT. My lord, hath aught been seen of our dear child ?

CESTA. Has she been found, Sir Simon ? Quickly speak.

GAM. Your Simon hath encountered dangers, love—

KAT. Where is Coranto, hath he not come too ?

GEOF. He seeketh still, like one indeed distraught.
We have but now returned.

KAT. And she is yet
Unfound ?

GAM. We speed again upon our search
As soon as we have changed our weary steeds.
Come, Cesta, comfort me, ere I again
Start on this perilous quest. Come, Cesta, kiss—

CESTA (aside). Nay, not before Lord Geoffry !

GAM. Art ashamed
To own it pleasures thee to kiss me, sweet ?
Of all the ailments women suffer from,
The worst is coyness, sure.

KAT. Dear Mirabelle
Hath wept the livelong night, and says, indeed,
She is alone to blame for all this woe.
And, good my lord, had she not been restrained,

She would, upon herself, have rashly done
Such bitter deeds as we must all have mourned.

GEOF. Had aught befallen Ranulf's only child,
A double grief must needs upon us all
Have straight been cast.

KAT. And trebly so on thee,
For she, my lord, hath tearfully confessed
She ever loved but one.

GEOF. Well, let us in—

GAM. Where is young Silvio, doth he weep too ?

CESTA. 'Tis left for maids to weep. He stalks about,
And says 'that Fate doth dominate our lives,
And we are what we are.'

GAM. 'Tis so with men.
We vow to live a sainted, holy life,
When Fate, in guise of a fair shapely maid,
With a trim ankle and a slender waist,
Comes to beguile us to some pleasant sin ;
And, in the twinkle of a wicked eye,
Our resolution's naught.

CESTA. Sir Simon, fie !

KAT. (to GEOFFRY). Wilt thou not go to comfort Mirabelle ?

GEOF. She were best left alone. I'll join the Duke.

GAM. And I will lay me down awhile.

CESTA. To sleep ?

GAM. Nay, I will lie awake and ruminate
On wedded joys.

KAT. I will to Mirabelle,
And say you have returned.

CESTA. I will come too. (*Exeunt.*)

GAM. How weary am I ! Yet within the hour
We must take horse and scour the country round.

GEOF. We'll find the child, if we search on till fall !
Come, let us to the Duke. (*Goes to door.*)

GAM. I follow thee. (*Exeunt.*)

(Enter ELLALINE, looking pale and weary.)

ELLA. The dawn is past, and ere morn I must lie
Beside the little heart. (*Listens.*) They have returned.
I heard them searching for me in the wood,
But, like a timid hare, I trembling hid
Beneath the fern till they had gone away.
I could not die without a last farewell
To the fond home I have now grown to love.
Dear room, where I have passed so many hours,
All filled with girlish happiness and mirth,
Farewell ! Farewell ! Nay, nay, I must not weep,
For all my trouble now will soon be o'er.

(Starts back with a cry, as she catches sight of
herself in the mirror.)

How like a ghost I look in the pale light.
I should not know myself, so weary, wan.
Within this window I have often sat
Beside my love. 'Twas here he kissed me first
And bade me twine my arms about his neck——
Now, I am loved no more. But I am glad
And must not weep, and, if the tears do come,

I'll say it is for joy, and not from grief.
Sweet flow'rs, that I have cherished lovingly
Until each bud seemed like a baby life,
Farewell! (*Kisses them.*) Some other hand will tend your
wants
When I am gone. I hope they will be kind,
For your sake and for mine. Hush! some one
comes.
I will steal softly down the corridor,
And so to where my mother's picture hangs,
For I must look once more upon her face
Before I lay me down. Her gentle smile
Will give me strength to plunge into the lake. (*Exit.*)

(*Enter, at other side, CORANTO.*)

COR. Back to the castle; but without a hope
Of ever seeing Ellaline again.
Oh, heartless Fate, to take her winsome life
When the rough wind, and waves all angry white,
Conjoined, as by a blessed miracle,
To yield me up the charm—the precious heart—
That, like a spectral pearl, shone luminous
In the pale crescent moon. Here is the power
To give her back the joys of sweet content
And happiness unbounded. Yet she's gone,
And I shall never hear her merry laugh,
Or look again upon her smiling face.

(Enter KATRONA.)

KAT. Welcome, Coranto ; hast seen aught of her ?

COR. The child is dead——

KAT. Nay, dear one, say not so !
Tell me, I prithee, all that hath befall'n.

COR. My heart is sick, and I would be alone
To nurse my grief.

KAT. Come, let me comfort thee.
Look up and smile.

COR. I ne'er shall smile again.

KAT. Think she will yet return ; let your grief melt.
The morning light will surely bring her back.

COR. I'll search from morn till e'en, and then again
Till morn, and night shall find me still
Upon my search. I will be satisfied
That she's alive or dead, my fondest child.

KAT. Rest thee assured she lives, and will return
Ere this day hath grown old ; but who comes here ?

COR. The cause of all our woe ! Get thee within ;
I may not choose my words when he is by.

KAT. Restrain thy wrath, I beg.

COR. Words cannot kill,
Or he would long have gone to his account.
Get thee within.

KAT. I'll wait on Mirabelle.

(Enter SILVIO.)

(*Aside, looking at SILVIO.*) There is a look of sorrow on
his face,

And yet he surely lacks all sense of grief. (*Exit.*)

SIL. Hath aught been seen, Coranto——

COR. Get thee hence !

Her coming or her going's naught to thee.

SIL. You wrong me, by my soul. I deeply grieve
That aught should have befallen Ellaline !

COR. Your grief sits like a mask upon the face
Of some poor player who has not learnt the art
To simulate that which he fain would feel.

Your love for Ellaline was so, no more.

SIL. By Heav'n, you wrong me still, for I have loved
Fair Ellaline with feverish passion !

COR. Your feverish passion was a foul disease,
A sad corruption, breeding pain and death !

SIL. 'Twas life to me to be beloved by her !
If I have ceased to feel my pulses throb
At her approach or music of her voice,
The fault is in my blood, which will not stir
At my command.

COR. You never loved the child !

SIL. All beauteous things I cannot choose but love.

COR. Aye, for a day, a week, a month, no more !

SIL. To wear her image for a single hour
Is to live on in dreamful ecstasy,
For years, in passioned poesy.
The joyous time I've passed with Ellaline,
Amid the leafy splendours of the woods,
Have been recorded in such tuneful rhyme

That lovers, yet unborn, will learn to plead
In the soft language we have used,
And, heart to heart, pour out their full of love !

COR. So you would justify a theft of life,
And hopeless bankrupt make a woman's heart,
With its rich treasury of love and trust,
To purchase empty fame !

SIL. I am a poet,
And look on Nature, animate and dead,
As means to one great end.

COR. What is that end ?

SIL. To teach mankind a knowledge of itself !
The infinite capacity within
For evil, or for good. Man is supreme
When he can stay the wasteful hand of Time,
And set the fleeting glories of his kind
Within a deathless shrine. That is my bent !
I'd bare each passion, analyze each sense,
Weigh ev'ry heartbeat in the panting breast
Of her who suffered most for love of me,
To make my name immortal among men
And in their memory live eternally !

COR. There are no bounds to your presumption.
You talk of man as if he were a god,
And could outlive a petty sum of years.
Stand but upon the summit of a cliff
And mark what pygmies men and women look
Upon the beach a hundred yards beneath ;

Then think of Nature's awful majesty,
The vastness of her realm, her life eternal,
And in that contemplation find humility.
About us are a hundred million worlds,
All whirling in an endless round of space ;
Mighty upheavals daily give sweet life
To species still undreamt of here on earth ;
And yet the boundless arrogance of man
Would claim, by right, for his especial use,
The sun, the moon, the starry firmament,
And all the grandeur of the universe !

SIL. I'm humbled, sir—and yet 'tis Nature's fault
That we are thus, or thus——

COR. (*at window*). That figure—there—
Speeding towards the lake. 'Tis Ellaline !
Merciful powers, she's going to her death !
Unbend, stern Fate, and let her life be spared ;
Let not the water enviously clasp
Her in its cold embrace. (*Exit.*)

SIL. I too should fly !
Why do I tarry now, as if in fear ?
Irresolution, cursèd be thy name,
If any ill befall this gentle maid !
He turns the bend—I'll follow him——

(*About to go off, when he is confronted by GEOFFRY and GAMBER.*)

GEOF. Nay, stay.
GAM. Sir Troubadour, we have been seeking thee.
SIL. What would you with me ?—pray, some other time.

GEOF. (*drawing his sword*). Now, by my honour, you shall not go hence

Till you have answered for your treachery
To Ellaline ! Draw and defend yourself,
Or by my soul, I'll kill you where you stand !

GAM. A dead man's neither fish, nor flesh, nor fowl ;
Why, an old rooster is indeed more prized.

SIL. If Mirabelle hath cooled in her regard——

GEOF. My tongue is in my sword !

SIL. Then let it speak !

I am so buffeted and low at heart,
I care not what may hap.

GAM. A spirit boy,
Which ev'ry courtly gentleman should show
Before King Death. (*They fight.*)

GAM. Well parried ! Come—Again.
Here are two masters. 'Tis a grand display
Of tierce and carte.

(*They are fighting as enter MIRABELLE followed by KATRONA and CESTA.*)

MIRA. Hold, hold, I pray you both !

KAT. Here is foul murder tow'rd !

CESTA. Where is the Duke ?

MIRA. Stay your hand, Geoffry——

GEOF. Fear you for his life ?

MIRA. I fear for thine.

SIL. Come, sir, and do your spite.

GAM. This is no sport for ladies. Get thee in.

GEOF. Enough of parley——

MIRA. Nay, you shall not fight !

I know I am the cause ; but, Geoffry dear,
My love was ever thine. If I did walk
With Silvio—to my deep shame I own—
'Twas but to rouse you to your former state,
When you did love me well.

GEOF. It may be so.

MIRA. Your words of doubt are justly my reward
For all the grief I've brought on Ellaline !

GEOF. I fight for her, so back, I prithee, back.

KAT. Blood will be shed——

CESTA. Unless the Duke come quick !

MIRA. You shall not fight, or if that be your bent,
Kill me, my lord, for I am all to blame !

SIL. Nay, I alone am culpable in that.

GEOF. And so we fight—Come to't without delay.

(Enter RANULF.)

RAN. Who talks of fighting ? What, my lord of Stene
And Silvio displaying skill at fence ?
Put up your blades. Nay, weep not, Mirabelle ;
This is an idle brawl——

GEOF. But, my good lord——

RAN. I have no wish to hear who is at fault.
Be friends, as you were wont ; it is my will !

GEOF. But he hath ta'en——

MIRA. Dear love, the fault was mine.

RAN. This is no time for words. Put't up, I say !

The sun hath topped the hills, and we should be
Searching, through wood and vale, for Ellaline.

SIL. Coranto saw her but a moment since
Speeding towards the lake—

KAT. Towards the lake !

CESTA. Oh, if aught should befall !

GEOF. (*putting up his sword*). Then let us haste
And bring her safely back !

SIL. My life for hers
Would I most freely give !

RAN. The horses wait.

MIRA. Listen ! What noise is that ? (*They listen.*) 'Tis
Ellaline.

KAT. I hear Coranto's voice.

CESTA. She hath returned.

SIL. (*aside*). I almost fear to look upon her face.

GEOF. Yes, 'tis her gentle voice—

RAN. The gods be praised !

(*Enter ELLALINE and CORANTO. Sunlight breaks in.*)

ELLA. I will not part with it again, Coranto.

COR. Then you will never know the pangs of love
Or grief, and all the past will be a dream.

ELLA. It was a dream, but now I have awaked.

MIRA. Dear Ellaline, forgive me for the woe
I have brought on your life.

ELLA. Kiss me, dear coz.

(*Kisses her.*)

Look up and smile—and uncle—Silvio,
Be merry all. The time, in sooth, is past
For pain and sadness—Do not speak, I pray—
Coranto hath made known the cause of grief.
I have been ill and feverish with dreams.

SIL. With dreams.

COR. (*aside*). Love was no more to her.

ELLA. Now, mark,
And I'll recount what troubled phantasies
Passed through my aching brain.

RAN. Prithee go on.
(*Aside*) Her grief hath surely gone.

ELLA. Methought—'twas strange—
Methought that I had Silvio grown to love,
And he did give his plighted troth to me—
What foolish thoughts come to us all in dreams!—
For then, it seemed to me, he grew less fond,
And turned to Mirabelle, who dearly loved
Him in return.

MIRA. (*to GEOFFRY*). I never loved but thee!

COR. (*aside*). Nay, do not heed.

ELLA. I said it was a dream

GAM. Aye, in good truth you did.

KAT. A feverish dream.

ELLA. But now, fond coz, to prove that all was false,
Take Geoffry by the hand.

COR. (*aside*). Do as she bids.

GEOF. With all my heart, I take her by the hand.

ELLA. And, Silvio, to add unto our mirth
(For we must merry be), take up your lute
And play some fancy, gentle as the wind,
When it breathes kisses on the buds of Spring.

SIL. (*aside*). There is some charm——

COR. (*aside*). The charm is Innocence;
Her happiness, Content.

ELLA. Come, Silvio, come,
We wait for your sweet strains. Coranto, you
Shall sit by me, the rest somewhat away,
For I have much to say to you alone. (*They sit.*)
Now, Silvio, begin, and let your song
Be soft and low, for 'tis yet early morn,
And it may hap that all the sleeping flow'rs
And nestling birds will, from your melody,
Take joyous dreams ; and, if mine eyelids droop
And I should sleep, take not the lightest heed ;
Dreams bring dear happiness as well as pain ;
And to my heart grief ne'er will come again.

(*Kisses the amulet. Then rests her head on CORANTO'S shoulder as SILVIO plays on the lute.*)

ELVESTINE

A TRAGIC PLAY

IN THREE ACTS.

Characters.

ARCHIBALD, LORD MARSTON.

COLONEL JASPER DRUMMOND.

CAPTAIN BURLING.

REUBEN (*old serving-man to Elvestine*).

ELVESTINE.

MARIE (*her companion*).

Place.

ACT I.—*Near Seaton Manor.*

ACTS II. AND III.—*Marston Hall.*

Period—1685.

TO
WILLIAM G. WILLS
THIS PLAY IS
Dedicated,
BY HIS AFFECTIONATE FRIEND,
THE AUTHOR.

1887.

ACT I.

SET SCENE.—*Beautiful garden in Seaton Manor.*

CAPTAIN BURLING (*disguised as a priest*) and REUBEN
discovered.

BURLING:

HERE is the clue, a pretty pastoral,
In my Lord Marston's hand ; and without doubt
Transcribed for Mistress Seaton. You shall hear.
(Reads) 'How sweet and peaceful at cool eventide,
When all the trouble of the day has ceased,
Are the broad meadow lands in summer time.
The myriad grasses, ever smiling,
Sway to the music of the gentle wind,
Which sings a lullaby to shrub and flow'r.
And love'—

REUB. Good Captain—

BUR. Captain—nay, nay, friend,
I am *Father* Burling here. A simple priest
Who lives a holy life—

REUB. (*laughing*). Aye, in good sooth !

BUR. Passing the days in piety and prayer.

REUB. (*stifling a laugh*). Good *Father* Burling, I would humbly crave

Your pardon for my lack of reverence ;
But, by my faith in brown October ale,
I took you for that daring, reckless brave,
The favoured gallant of a score of dames,
Who serves young Monmouth 'gainst the Papist King.

BUR. Prate not so loud ! The air is thick with spies ;
Hedgerows have ears, and posies wag their tongues,
And there be trees that whisper all day long,
Like village gossips o'er a wicked tale.
The reckless man who sported at the court
Of Charles the Merry and mad Buckingham,
The friend of Wycherley and Mistress Gwynn,
Is now sworn foe to James the beetle-browed.

REUB. And you have cause to hate this monkish king,
Who looks on pleasure with a jaundiced eye.
'Slife, had you drunk the sacramental wine,
And for your mistress filched the holy cup,
Your punishment would then have been severe !
To strip you of your rank for a wild freak——

BUR. A pest on James, and on those canting knaves
Who counselled my disgrace ! They falsely swore—
But let it pass—for all the world knows well
The basest lie, hid by some flow'r of speech,
Some cunning ornament, or pretty phrase,
Will lose all likeness to the thing it is,
And wear upon its front the badge of truth.

REUB. 'Tis so, indeed, but vengeance waits on time.

BUR. The strongest oak must fall before the axe,
And we are strong in courage, wisdom, wealth.

REUB. Hast news of import for Lord Marston's ear?

BUR. I have a token from good Master Grey
Which I must give into his hands ere night.
At Marston Hall they told me ev'ry morn
He cometh here to pace this fragrant walk
With Mistress Seaton. And this pastoral——

REUB. About this hour he cometh ev'ry morn.

BUR. Then I will stay awhile. (*Sits.*) But, honest friend,
Hast not a flask of Muscatel within
To drink to Monmouth and the common cause?
For twenty hours I have been on the road,
And have not cracked a cup or kissed a wench,
Therefore my heart is heavy, sad, and sick.

REUB. I have a bottle of rich mellow wine,
Which has lain snug since Charles the Martyr died.
But for a wench, unless the fates be kind,
I cannot humour thee.

BUR. The fates are kind,
For hither cometh one who, by my soul,
Should wear a petticoat!

REUB. 'Tis Marie, sure,
My lady mistress' maid and confidante.
BUR. What, peerless Marie, whom I vow I love?
Gad, how my blood goes skipping through my veins!
REUB. Remember, holy father, you are now

A simple priest who lives a sainted life,
 Passing the days in piety and prayer. (*Laughs.*)
 BUR. (*laughing*). I have to Marie full confession made
 So stand absolved from all my holy vows.

(*Enter MARIE.*)

Ah, dearest daughter, like the blessed sun,
 Which kisses tender flow'rs to smiling life,
 You come to rouse me from my drooping state
 To blossom'd happiness.

MAR. A pretty speech,
 Which to strange ears would sound too honied sweet
 For priestly greeting. Sooth, you should begin,
 (Imitating priest's voice.)

'My blessing, daughter. *Pax vobiscum*, child.'
 And thus upturn your eyes and cross your hands.
 BUR. St. Dunstan would have met you with a kiss,
 And, by the saints—a proper oath to swear—
 I hold you not a whit less dear than he !

(*Tries to kiss her.*)

MAR. Stand off, I pray you ! I will not be kissed
 By any man who wears a shaven crown.

BUR. This masquerade—I wear it for the cause !

REUB. The cause of love, good mistress.

MAR. Stand thee off !

BUR. Oh for the perfumed locks I have forsworn !
 Wilt not take pity on a forlorn wretch
 Who pines in secret for thy lightest thought ?

REUB. Take pity on him, Marie.

MAR. I prithee stand away!

REUB. Ah, she is coy ;
All maidens are the same. They first deny,
Then, trembling, hope their lovers will be bold,
And steal by force that which they fain would give.
Gad, when I numbered quite a score of years
I could not fondle when in company :
Now I would take a wench upon each knee,
And that before the world.

MAR. Art not ashamed
To boast of thy misdeeds?

BUR. Why, in old men
"Tis counted glory thus to prate of love.

REUB. (*to BURLING*). I could some tales make known unto
thine ear—

Well—well—in private, when we are alone.

(Chuckles to himself.)

MAR. Good Master Burling, prithee tell me this :
Came you to seek my lady Elvestine ?
If it be so, she hath not yet returned
From tending on her aged pensioners.

BUR. Touching my errand here, good mistress prim,
I sought this fairy paradise of bloom,
Hoping to find the Lord of Marston Hall.

MAR. His lordship hath gone down towards the lake.

BUR. Then I will follow.

REUB. Nay, he will return.
Have I not said he cometh ev'ry morn
To greet our mistress here?

BUR. A dainty spot.
Gad's life, the very air is filled with song!

MAR. We call this bower the Justice Court of Love,
For here young Cupid daily holds assize
And seals each bond 'twixt comely maid and youth,
When heart to heart they give their plighted troth.
Here broken vows are punished with the fine
Of sorrowful regret or misery,
While constancy hath ever its reward
In sweet content and perfect happiness.

BUR. If this be, then, the very home of love,
Why art so cold when I would fondle thee?

MAR. I hold this place too sacred for light sport.
My dearest mistress, whom I honour most,
Hath by her presence made it holy ground.

REUB. Why, ev'ry place is holy where love dwells.
I have a pantry sainted ere to day.

BUR. A truce to jests! Good Marie, tell me this—
For rumour, like a scandalous old maid,
Doth joy to smirch the lives of fair repute—
Is not your lady favoured with the love
Of Jasper Drummond, colonel of Dragoons?

MAR. The colonel liveth yonder at the Grange,
And pleasant is the walk through Holfern copse.

BUR. So, you would say, he passes to and fro?

REUB. He is an enemy to Monmouth's cause,
A friend of James, and our most deadly foe !

BUR. Still he may love thy mistress. Eh, Marie ?

MAR. He cannot choose but love so dear a life.

Her gentle nature winneth all our hearts ;
For old and young she hath a kindly word,
While for the sick, the troubled, and infirm,
She shows such boundless sympathy and love,
That day by day they watch for her approach,
As hungry birds the hand that gives them food.

BUR. Such qualities in women are most rare,
And Colonel Drummond would discernment lack
If he were blind to her uncounted worth.

REUB. He hath a craving for my lady, sure.

MAR. But then, to hope to win—I needs must laugh
When I compare the colonel, grim and gray,
So coldly courteous, with my good lord !
I'faith now, father, he's a proper man,
Handsome and bold, and manly—

REUB. Hush, Marie, hush—
Hear you not voices in the laurel grove ?

MAR. My lady hath returned.

BUR. And by her side
Lord Marston surely walks.

REUB. They turn the bend.
Why, as I live, 'tis not my lord at all.

BUR. Then who, good Reuben, keeps her company ?

REUB. See you not, Marie ?

MAR. 'Tis the grim colonel.

BUR. Say you so, child? then let us quickly in! 'Twere dangerous to meet his searching eye.

MAR. 'Tis he indeed—I have no wish to stay.

BUR. Then let us go within. (Exit MARIE.)

REUB. What does he here
In such close converse—

BUR. That we will discuss
Over the bottle of old Muscatel
You have so snugly hid.

REUB. Still I would know
What bus'ness brings him here.

BUR. Come, Reuben, come.
(Takes him off.)

(Enter ELVESTINE and COLONEL DRUMMOND.)

DRUM. There are assaults a soldier fears far more
Than perilous sieges—deadly ambuscades.
'Tis when mad passion renders duty blind,
And reason, vanquished, yields to strong desire

ELV. In youth, I know, our wishes gallop on,
Outpacing judgment—'tis not so with age.

DRUM. You think that I am old—a gaunt gray-beard—

ELV. Nay, Colonel, nay—indeed I do protest!

DRUM. Unspoken thoughts are dumbly eloquent
Upon a face as open as the day.

ELV. Then I must strive to be unlike myself,
And purse my lips—frown *so*—or wear a smile,

Lest I should give some sudden, grave offence
When I would be most kind.

DRUM. Nay, be yourself,
Free from all guile. Yet I would have you know
Age is not always crowned with silver hair,
Nor youth with locks that match the raven's wing.
At twenty men are old, at forty young,
According to the tenor of their lives.
Within the compass of a summer's day,
A span of life may be—aye, many lives—
For our emotions are not gauged by time,
But by intensity.

ELV. I would be chid
In such a wise for ev'ry petty fault.
'Twere joy to be reproved—

DRUM. Had I the right
To guide your life in all, dear Elvestine—

ELV. You were my father's friend—

DRUM. I loved him well.
And many a time we battled side by side
With Rupert 'gainst the Dutch. Then he would speak
Of his dear one at home—his winsome child,
Recounting ev'ry grace, until I grew
To know and love each quality of worth.

ELV. Did he not add the sum of all my faults,
My waywardness, ill-temper, bursts of spleen?
You do not know the baser parts of me.

DRUM. Since you have grown from girl to womanhood,

I've noted with delight those gentle traits
Which have endeared you both to old and young.
As on clear nights men gaze into the sky
And by long patience lovingly espy
New starlight beauties twinkling in the blue,
So have I looked with sympathy and love
Into the hidden depths of your pure life
Till all its sweetness stands revealed to me.
I know your worth, and feel how much I lack ;
Yet if devotion and a soldier's love——

ELV. You cannot mean—this is so sudden—strange :
Nay, do not question, lest I give you pain.
I would be friends as we have always been.
I do not think——

DRUM. Dear Elvestine, think now ;
Question your heart before you make reply !
My love is not the fleeting love of youth——
A flow'r that buds and dies 'twixt morn and e'en——
'Tis the deep-rooted passion of a man,
Which grows with age, and lives for what it loves.
Take counsel with yourself ; let me return
Before you say the word !

ELV. I should be wrong
To let you go away with aught of hope,
When in my heart there is but one reply.
I should be false to you and him I love——

DRUM. Is it, then, true Lord Marston fills your life ?

ELV. Until this hour that secret was our own,
For we have cherished it unknown to all——

DRUM. Oh that your choice had lighted somewhere else !

I say this not from bitterness of heart,
That he has gained the jewel I would wear ;
It is because I love you, and would stand
Between you and all harm.

ELV. What peril, then,
Threatens to kill my peace ?

DRUM. Your love for Marston !

ELV. He is the noblest, bravest man alive,
And would be worthy any woman's love !

DRUM. Noble and brave, and there the danger lies,
For he upholds young Monmouth 'gainst his king !
He is suspected at the Court of James
With other disaffected noblemen.
If haply it should reach Whitehall that you
Hold loving converse with him day by day,
The taint of treason will be fixed on you.

ELV. And why should I shrink back in childish fear
Because this priest-led king suspects my lord ?
My sympathies are with Duke Monmouth too,
And what I can I will to aid his cause !

DRUM. Are you distraught ? Be warned, be warned in time.
The bastard's cause can lead but to disgrace !
Your father, had he lived, would have denied
The claims set up for Lucy Waters' child.

ELV. She was the lawful wife of our late king.

DRUM. This is Lord Marston's teaching, Elvestine,
And it is false !

ELV. Then is all teaching false,
The prayers we learn, the words of Holy Writ !
As well might seek to change glad summer-time
To winter keen, as make me doubt my love !

DRUM. King Charles was never wed, but to his queen.

ELV. You are a soldier serving under James,
And by your oath in strict allegiance bound
To spread these ill-reports about the duke.

DRUM. If my commission were my means of life
I would resign it rather, and go starve,
Than live by slander—I will say no more.
'Tis sad you do not know me, Elvestine.

ELV. If I have spoken harshly, pray forgive ;
I am not well to-day.

DRUM. I am to blame,
I should have counselled you in gentler tones.

ELV. And I replied with more humility.

DRUM. A kindly patience best becomes us all.

ELV. I did not mean to grieve you.

DRUM. Look not sad,
And do not think your answer was unkind.
'Twere better far to know than fear the worst.
Now I can laugh, and rail at unseen fate,
It cannot injure me : while here comes one
Who will win back your bonny smile again.

ELV. 'Tis Archibald !

DRUM. The sun has topped the clouds.
Said I not so ? Dear Elvestine, farewell.

ELV. Nay, not farewell.

DRUM. I will be close at hand
When most you need my help.

ELV. Looks he not brave?

DRUM. There is a mist before mine eyes—Farewell.

(Enter ARCHIBALD, LORD MARSTON.)

ARCH. Fair greeting, Colonel. (*Offers his hand.*)

DRUM. Greeting, sir, to you.

(*Coldly bows and exit.*)

ARCH. The sun has played the sluggard, Elvestine,
And slept awhile upon the pillowy clouds,
Or I had kept my tryst an hour ago.

ELV. I waited where the willows slant their heads
To watch their changeful beauties in the stream.
Then Colonel Drummond came—

ARCH. Your pardon, sweet.

ELV. (*playfully*). I think I should impose some heavy fine,
Inflict some punishment—What now would serve?

ARCH. Chastise me with a frown, not too severe,
Lest I should be bowed by weight of sentence.

ELV. Were I a queen, endowed with sovereign power,
I would consign you to some lonesome cell,
Where you could expiate your great offence.
Or I would banish you to some far land,
And under pain of sudden, awful death,
Forbid you to approach my presence here.

ARCH. You hold dominion over all our hearts,
And we pay loving tribute day by day ;
Therefore make light my fine, and learn, dear one,
Great queens are ever the most merciful.

ELV. Since you repent, I will show clemency,
And pardon you your fault—and, in good sooth,
My foolish heart is glad that you are come.

ARCH. Would we could meet a hundred times a day !
And yet, dear Elvestine, I ne'er would know
The sadness born of parting for an hour.

ELV. You would soon tire if I were always near.

ARCH. Nay, I would have you like the birds and flow'rs,
And the soft light that comes at eventide,
Ever about my home to gladden me.

ELV. My faults are many, and they then would grow
Like idle weeds upon a kindly soil.
I am most choleric and quick of tongue ;
My changeful humour must not be denied—

ARCH. Your faults are beauties which I would not change
For the best graces other women own.

ELV. The proverb says that Flattery's like a hill
Down whose steep sides the giddy and the vain
Rush at a break-neck pace.

ARCH. I do not fear
To tell you the plain truth, my Elvestine.

ELV. I am a woman, and, like all my sex,
Alack, am somewhat vain.

ARCH. I will not hear

You slander your own self—Nay, not a word.

(*Kisses her.*)

Besides, sweetheart, I have so much to say
Touching our love and—

ELV. Hath aught befallen ?

ARCH. Sit by my side—

ELV. How gravely you said that.

ARCH. Here where the shadows dance in giddy sport.
The time hath come, dear Elvestine—and yet—

ELV. Why do you put this check upon your speech
And droop your lids as if you fain would hide
Some painful thought from me ?

ARCH. I will speak out,
For I would have your counsel and advice.
Did you not note how Colonel Drummond turned,
Refusing my advance ?

ELV. He was remiss.

ARCH. It was not motiveless—without design :
I know full well he is mine enemy.

ELV. He hath been ever friendly, Archibald.

ARCH. So, too, was Judas, till the time did serve
To strike the Master down. Great villainies
Are always masked beneath a friendly guise ;
And the stanch grip when palm is clasped to palm,
Which seems to speak such honest good intent,
Oft covers malice and a deadly hate.

ELV. You wrong him, dear—indeed I know him well.
He loved my father, and his love for me—

ARCH. His love for you ! Why, hath he then said aught ?

ELV. Nay, do not question—know my love is thine.

ARCH. (*kissing her*). And it is mine to cherish as a dower
Bequeathed in sacred trust. I would not lose
Or part with it for all the rare delights
This earth can give, or the great world beyond.
I want you for my wife, and yet, dear one,
'Twould be unjust, now that the danger's near,
To ask this boon of you.

ELV. Then do not ask,
But let me freely give myself to thee.
The privilege to share thy dangers, love,
Would be my greatest joy !

ARCH. Say you so, dear ?
And yet you do not know what peril waits
Upon this enterprise. If we should fail
To place the son of Charles upon the throne
A bloody vengeance will be ta'en on us.
Not only will our lands be confiscate,
But life itself may pay the penalty.
Therefore I shrink from asking you to join
Your lot with mine, till Monmouth be crowned king.

ELV. The ivy clings more closely to the oak,
E'en to the killing of the thing it loves,
When cruel storms would burst the tender bonds ;
And the poor doe that trembling stands beside
Her stricken lord, will not be driven off
By hunter or by hound. So would I be.

ARCH. Do not wish that.

Fate hath a store of troubles in his pack,
Which Time will surely mete out to us all
Long ere our course has run ; and those who sigh
And yearn for aught, thus showing discontent,
Have double burdens saddled on their backs.
Therefore take heed, lest, fond one, by your wish
Some sorrow come to strike us both to earth.

ELV. To tempt our fate is wantonness at best,
Yet I would show the depth of my great love.
'Tis sudden danger, striking swiftly home,
That proves the true at heart.

ARCH. The test will come,
For ev'ry hour I wait the good report
That Monmouth's ships lie anchored off the coast.

(Enter BURLING.)

Whom have we here? Why, Captain Burling, sure
BUR. Have you a moment's leisure, good my lord?

ARCH. You come from Master Grey—What tidings—Speak !

Before this lady you may freely talk.

She is a friend to Monmouth and the cause.

ELV. My lord and I are one—so prithee, speak !

BUR. Mine errand here is to deliver this
To your safe keeping.

ELV. 'Tis a signet ring.

ARCH. (*joyfully*). It is the token promised me by Grey !

ELV. The token, dearest—What doth it import ?

ARCH. That which all loyal hearts have waited for,
Counting the days till hope and faith had fled ;
Month followed month, but still no tidings came,
And hot resolve grew cold before delay.
But now from north to south there will uprise
Ten thousand warriors armèd for the fight.
This signet ring—dumb, love, to you—proclaims
That Monmouth, our young king, has safely landed.

ELV. King Monmouth landed—Say you so, dear heart ?

ARCH. Now let these papists tremble at Whitehall,
For Monmouth's landing heralds James's fall !

ACT II.

THREE WEEKS AFTER.

SCENE.—*A room in Marston Hall.*

Enter CAPTAIN BURLING, dressed as a soldier. He is somewhat travel-stained.

BUR. This is Lord Marston's room, but still no voice
Betokens life. The open fields at noon,
When the hot sun sears ev'ry blade of grass,
And drives the shepherd 'neath the dusty hedge,
Are not more silent. Where can all have fled?
A drowsy porter slumbered at the lodge,
And answered my inquiries with a snore.
Have I escaped a hundred deadly ills
To find the nest deserted by the brood?
This packet from the King, which I am charged
To give unto my lord, must reach his hands
Ere night. (*Looks out of window.*) Save for a thrush
upon the walk,
The chase is tenantless. (*Goes to the door and looks within.*) Yet here is laid

A sumptuous repast. Gad's life, my lord
Cannot be far from hence ! I will within.
But who sits yonder ? Why, 'tis Marie sure.
She waits upon her mistress. (*Calls.*) Marie—child !

MAR. (*from inside*). What, Captain Burling !

BUR.

It is she indeed !

(*Enter MARIE.*)

MAR. How pale and wan you look. Are you a ghost
Or breathing flesh and blood ?

BUR. Where is my lord ?

MAR. Is this your greeting after three long weeks
Of cruel silence ?

BUR. Answer me, I pray.

My errand here is urgent, and will brook
Of no delay. Had I but leisure, child,
I would pay tribute to those tempting lips,
And dull the edge of hunger with a kiss.
But I must waste no time in idle sport,
So, prithee, tell me, is my lord within ?

MAR. Were I discreet, Sir Captain, I should send
You, will-o'-wisp like, on a fruitless chase—
But who could be discreet on such a morn ?

BUR. You turn and double so ere you reply,
I ne'er shall reach the goal of my desire.

MAR. You must have patience. Know you not, to-day
Lord Marston and my lady are made one ?

BUR. Married to-day !

MAR. Aye, privately, within
The little chapel hidden in yon wood.
By this they should be wed.

BUR. God help her, then !

MAR. Bring you ill tidings for my noble lord ?

BUR. I bear a packet from the King himself,
Which I must place into his hands forthwith.
Had Drummond's soldiers not been on the road,
My lord and I would now be in the field.

MAR. Heav'n help my mistress, if you come to snatch
Her husband from her side !

BUR. He must away
With all the speed he can.

MAR. Oh, say not so !

BUR. Ere the sun sets he should be leagues from this.

MAR. 'Twill break my lady's heart !

BUR. She must be brave.

MAR. Brave, when her love is hurried to the fight,
Perchance to meet his death !

BUR. Marie, farewell ;
I must go seek my lord.

MAR. Nay, tarry here
Until they both return. A short delay—

BUR. I dare not stay.

MAR. Then give me this despatch,
And I will straightway take it to my lord.

BUR. I know the chapel—where the lime walk ends—

MAR. You can deny my wish, and yet you say
You love me well.

BUR. I have a duty, sweet——

MAR. Which I will undertake. Come, let me give
This packet to my lord, while you within
Shall stay your hunger with such dainty fare
As would delight a jaded appetite.
'Tis but a moment's respite I would ask
For my dear mistress' sake. Grant me this wish.
BUR. You tempt me sorely.

(Enter REUBEN.)

I am famished, child.

REUB. What, Captain Burling, famished ; Gad's my life !
When on the board there is a fine sirloin,
So juicy, rich and rare. It scents the room
With a sweet perfume.

MAR. Yet, would you believe,
I find it hard to tempt this hungry man
To tarry for awhile.

REUB. How fares the cause ?

BUR. Well, Reuben, well. Within a week our King
Will rule at Westminster.

REUB. Why then this haste,
When such good cheer awaits——

BUR. To tarry now
Might mean disaster—aye, it might mean death.

MAR. How groundless are your fears.

REUB. And were they real
I know no better time to face grim death

Than when the stomach's lined. Come, Captain, come,
And drain a flask with me.

BUR. I needs must yield.

MAR. And it is wisely done. Give me your arm.

REUB. Smell you the joint?

BUR. It overcomes my will.

REUB. That is a pasty—venison, i' faith.

MAR. Reuben, go before. Captain, lean on me.

(*Exit REUBEN.*)

BUR. Ah, Marie, you would tempt a saint to fall.

MAR. I like not those who never sin at all.

(*He kisses her, and they exeunt.*)

(*Pause. COLONEL DRUMMOND appears at the window. He looks in, then enters.*)

DRUM. So far my resolution falters not.

Will it stand firm when we are face to face?

Both pride and duty I have thrown aside,

To save my rival from a certain death.

How easy, when the conscience soundly sleeps,

It is to cheat oneself to the belief

That actions base are noble in themselves;

And many a man, by thinking, will beguile

His better judgment to some shameful deed,

From which at first he would have shrunk aghast

I come with one desire to save his life,

For, were he slain, she too would pine and die.

And yet a voice within mocks my intent,

And says, the motive for this kindly act
 Is selfish love, to win her from his side.
 If that were so, how easy it would be
 To let him go and join the rebel duke,
 When his swift death would end all rivalry.
 Ignoble thoughts make ev'ry action base,
 Turning brave deeds to abject cowardice.
 But, who comes here? Lord Marston, and, i' faith,
 Dear Elvestine. What doth she here with him,
 Arm linked in arm, and eye upturned to eye?
 They come this way. I will within awhile,
 For I would not she saw me in this place.

(Retires behind hangings. ELVESTINE, leaning on the arm of ARCHIBALD, LORD MARSTON, appears at the open window.)

ELV. Did you not notice, as we left the church,
 How yonder cloud seemed suddenly to float
 From out the blue—as if, dear love, it were
 An evil omen threatening our peace?

ARCH. Look up, fond heart. See, it has passed away.
 All is as joyful as our lives will be.
 Kind Nature wears her daintiest to-day;
 The very birds pour out their souls in song,
 While trees and flow'rs and shrubs keep holiday.

ELV. Your words, dear one, have banished all my fears,
 And in my heart there is a festival. [home,

ARCH. (as he enters with her). My Elvestine, this is your future

Where you shall be my Lady Bountiful.
The warm west wind, when tender grasses peep
From out their pearly coverlet of snow—
The blessed rain after a season's drought,
The glimpse of light to those who have been blind—
Are not more welcome, love, than you are here,
Sweetheart, and wife, and mistress of my heart !

(*Embraces her.*)

ELV. How often, dearest husband, I have dreamt
Of precious happiness so like to this.
When day slept 'neath the jewelled cloak of night,
And beauteous stars brought messages of love.
In a sweet ecstasy I have upgazed,
And whispered to myself such fond replies,
As, wafted back, might give delight to thee.
And often, when the dawn crept shyly in,
I have, in fancy, conjured up a home,
Where endless joys should wait upon my lord :
While I, the humble mistress of it all,
Would wish for nothing but a smile or look
From him I loved so well.

ARCH. I too have dreamed
That you were queen of all I hold most dear,
And I your slave—as, in good sooth, I am.
I will watch o'er you with such patient care,
That ev'ry fleeting thought shall speak to me,
And wishes, long ere they have been expressed
Shall lovingly be met.

ELV. What can I give
In glad exchange for all your watchful care?
My home is poor beside this noble hall,
And for my wealth——

ARCH. You have bestowed on me
A gift more precious than the wealth of kings,
Or all the buried treasures of the sea.
The priceless dower of your boundless love
Makes me full rich in true felicity.

ELV. Would that I were a hundred times more fair,
So, in a measure, I might make amends
For qualities I lack. And yet, dear heart,
You shall not note my want of comeliness,
For I will set a hundred little traps,
And, by the very cunning of my love,
Make joyous ev'ry hour.

ARCH. Then will our lives
Be one long dream of perfect happiness,
Without a sorrow——

(Enter MARIE.)

MAR. Pardon me, my lord.

ARCH. Nay, you are welcome, since you come to say
That all is now prepared.

MAR. All is prepared
Within the council-room.

ARCH. Then, dearest one,
We will go in, and you shall grace the board
With your loved presence.

MAR. Yet before you go—

ELV. That packet, Marie, is it for my lord?

MAR. (aside). Would that I dare withhold it for awhile.

(Aloud to MARSTON) I have been charged to give this to your hand.

ARCH. Some greeting from a friend. Is it not so?

(Half-aside) The King's own seal!

MAR. (aside). Now I will go within.

Poor lady, it will break her gentle heart. (Exit.)

ELV. Know you the seal or writing, Archibald?

ARCH. It is King Monmouth's seal. What is within I shall soon learn. Your pardon, dearest love.

(Reads to himself.)

ELV. (aside). How eagerly he reads! And now his face Wears a grave anxious look. (Aloud) What tidings, love? Nothing, I hope, to mar this happy day.

ARCH. If, dearest Elvestine, I did not know That you were brave at heart, I should now shrink From telling you the truth.

ELV. The truth—the truth! Your words sound like a prelude, Archibald, Unto some fearful theme—

ARCH. Nay, fondest one.

ELV. This letter from the King, which moves you so, What doth it contain—some dreadful tidings Touching the cause?

ARCH. So far, success is ours.

ELV. Oh, do not set me on the rack of doubt.

Tell me the worst—I cannot bear suspense !

ARCH. Once, in the fulness of your love for me,
You wished for some swift test—

ELV. Hath the test come ?

ARCH. When I embarked upon this enterprise
I pledged my word that I would join the King
When danger threatened most.

ELV. To join the King
When danger threatened. But the cause fares well.

ARCH. Three days ago a messenger was sent
To bring me this despatch. He was delayed,
And tarried by the road, as the date shows.
This letter bids me haste, and take command
Of the battalions raised in Somerset.

ELV. And you must leave—

ARCH. I must away at once,
For life and death depend upon my speed !

ELV. Oh, say not that. I cannot let you go !

ARCH. To-morrow night, as it is purposed here,
We meet the troops led by grim Feversham.

ELV. Going to take command—to face attack—
Mayhap to be struck down ! Oh, Archibald,
You must not, shall not go !

ARCH. Dear love, be calm.
You are a soldier's daughter, and know well
The duty that I owe.

ELV. 'Twould break my heart
If you went from me now.

ARCH. Nay, do not weep.

ELV. This is our wedding morn. You will not go !
To-morrow, or the next day, dearest love,
I may have grown to bear this cruel blow ;
But not to-day. Oh, I shall go distraught !

ARCH. Dear Elvestine, be brave. Besides, my sweet,
There is no danger in this night attack.
Unseen, we mean to steal upon the foe,
And swiftly snatch a bloodless victory.
A few days hence I shall return to thee,
And thou wilt greet me with a fond embrace.

ELV. I seem to hear, and yet your voice is strange ;
I cannot see you, dearest, for my tears.
What did you say—that you were going hence,
Leaving me all alone—to nurse my fears,
And count the weary hours ? No, no, my love,
Let me come too ; I cannot part from you !

ARCH. You will unman me, my belovèd one,
If you give way. 'Tis sad enough to part,
And, sweetheart, I want all my fortitude.

ELV. I said it was an omen boding ill
Just as we left the church. I knew some grief
Would come to cloud our joy—

ARCH. The cloud will pass
You must take comfort, love.

ELV. And on this day ;
Without a warning dream—

ARCH.

Dear wife, be brave.

You promised me—the words live in my heart—
Should Monmouth's cause call me with swiftness hence,
Unlike those women who at parting weep,
You would bid me farewell with such a smile,
That its remembrance should bring comfort, sweet,
When I was sad and low. Where is the smile,
My dearest Elvestine?

ELV.

I will be brave;

'Tis cowardly to weep. But you are all
I have to love and hold; and should death come—

ARCH. I am still looking for the promised smile,

The dimpled smile to send me on my way,
With hope and joy as bucklers to my heart.

ELV. I am a woman, weak and full of fear—**ARCH.** My absence will be brief. Look up, dear heart.

Ah, there's the smile at last. (*Kisses her.*) Now I must go
And lead out Marmaduke.

ELV.

I will come too.

I cannot lose you for a moment, love,
While you remain.

ARCH.

In thought we ne'er will part,

My Elvestine.

ELV.

Never, in thought.

ARCH.

Come now.

ELV. And in my prayers your name shall always be.**ARCH.** Now let us haste. The sooner then shall I
Return to gladden thee.

ELV. Then make good speed,
For I would have you back long ere the dial
Has marked another hour.

ARCH. Come, then, away.

(As they are about to go within, COLONEL DRUMMOND confronts them.)

DRUM. Nay, stay.

ELV. Colonel Drummond !

ARCH. Am I betrayed ?

By heav'n, I will not lightly yield my life !

(Draws his sword.)

ELV. Forbear, dear love ; his sword shall pierce my heart
Ere it reach thee ! (Throws herself between them.)

DRUM. My lord, put up your sword,
And, good my lady, prithee pardon me
For breaking on your privacy and peace.

ELV. If your intent be friendly, as I hope,
You are right welcome here.

ARCH. He is a spy,
An eavesdropper—

ELV. Nay, nay, dear Archibald !

DRUM. First learn, my lord, what motive brought me here,
And then condemn my conduct, if you will.
I came alone, with only one desire—
To save you from yourself.

ARCH. What do you mean ?

ELV. Is there some danger threatening my love ?
I am his wife—

DRUM. That much I overheard,
But nothing more, upon a soldier's word—
Aye, on the honour of a gentleman !
My information hath a surer base
Than could be gained by listening at doors,
Like a liveried slave.

ARCH. You serve the cause
Of James——

DRUM. My purpose now is to serve you.
To save you from disgrace, perhaps from death.

ELV. Disgrace and death ?

ARCH. I go to victory.

ELV. Has swift disaster come upon our King,
That you speak thus ?

DRUM. Disaster will o'ertake
All those who go to join the rebel duke.

ARCH. This is an idle tale——

ELV. Let him speak on.

DRUM. If you go forth, my lord, to aid the duke,
You seek a certain death (*ELVESTINE gives a stifled cry*),
for the King's troops,

Both horse and foot, have marched on Bridgewater ;
And, as I live, no mercy will be shown
To any man found 'neath young Monmouth's flag.

ARCH. I shall not ask for mercy if I fall
Into this papist's hands.

ELV. Oh, Archibald !

ARCH. 'Tis life or death, and yet I falter not.

DRUM. Think of your wife.

ELV. (*proudly*). Nay, do not think of me.

ARCH. What do you here? And why this anxious care
To save me from myself? (*Laughing ironically.*) I did
not know

You had become so strong in friendliness
That for my sake you could ride forty miles,
Leaving your brave dragoons——

DRUM. Cut short your gibe
And learn 'twas not for your sake that I left
My duty and my men.

ARCH. For whose sake then?

ELV. (*aside*). Could it have been for me?

DRUM. It was to save
This lady from the grief her heart will know
If you are stricken down.

ELV. (*aside*). 'Twas for my sake:
True, noble-hearted man.

ARCH. Your pardon, sir:
For now I see you came with one resolve,
Which was to save my Elvestine from pain.

DRUM. I thought of her alone. You were as nought.
The danger that I ran in coming here
Was for her sake.

ELV. And from my inmost heart
I thank you for your thought.

ARCH. My thanks go too.
'Twas bravely done. But you mistake me, sir.
I am not yet so deaf to duty's call

That I should shrink from facing death itself
To aid the cause I pledged my life to serve !

DRUM. You owe a greater duty here at home
To this sweet lady, whom to-day you vowed
To cherish and protect.

ELV. And so he will.

ARCH. You are considered brave ; yet you advise
So dastardly a course, I can but think
You have some close design to wreck my peace.

ELV. Dear husband, think not that !

DRUM. (*with a sad smile*). 'Tis my reward.

ARCH. If you have faced some danger coming here,
Shall I brave none, when I have sworn on oath
To help, until the end, King Monmouth's cause ?
You say it was for Elvestine you came——

DRUM. For her alone. I had no other thought.

ARCH. Then she shall rule my course.

ELV. What would you, love ?

ARCH. Shall I remain, a traitor, with you here,
Justly despised for craven cowardice ;
Hated by all, and hating myself most ;
A perjured liar in the sight of God——

ELV. No, no ; not that !

DRUM. He goes, then, to his death.

ARCH. Or shall I go, with trust and hope within,
To stand or fall, as Heav'n shall direct ?

DRUM. Send him not hence, but use your boundless love
To keep him here

ARCH. Come, answer as my wife.

ELV. Though it would break my heart if any ill
Fell on your life, and I would keep you, dear,
For ever by my side, yet you are pledged
To help our gracious King——

DRUM. If he be dear,
Then fold him to your breast. Let him not go
To join this rabble rout. Think, Elvestine,
If he should fall——

ELV. Should fall!——

ARCH. Your answer, sweet,
Shall I remain or go?

DRUM. Pause, ere you speak!

ELV. God will protect and guard you, dearest—go!

DRUM. Then I have done! The rest is in God's hand. (*Exit.*)

ARCH. 'Twas bravely said! (*Embraces her.*) Now, fare thee
well, my love.

ELV. Farewell, farewell; may Heaven guard thy life.

ARCH. Smile on me, dear. (*She smiles.*) Its light will beam
on me

In many a fight. Now I must away.

I shall return to part from thee no more!

ELV. To part no more—no more. (*Exit ARCHIBALD.*)

Oh, he is gone!

Gone! What said I? Gone! No, he will return,
Never to part again; he told me so,
And he will keep his word. Yet at my heart
There is a speechless fear that some mischance

Will overtake his life. He shall not go !
I will beseech him stay. Dear Archibald,
Come back—come back to me ! I did not mean
To send you from my side ! I was distraught,
And knew not what I did. Come back, come back :
'Tis certain eath if you go from me. Death !
Can it be true—and I, his wife, have sent——
No, no, come back. Oh God ! what have I done ?
(*She staggers a few steps, then falls fainting with a cry.*)

ACT III.

Two Days After.

SCENE.—*Same as last Act. The shutters are closed, and candles are burning.*

REUBEN and MARIE discovered.

REUB. Gad's life ! they talked of nought but the dear lord,
His gallant bearing, and his bravery ;
The tavern rang with praises loud and deep,
And many a flagon of old Rhenish wine
Did I stow safe in toasting his good health.

MAR. Heard you no tidings of the battle, then ?
When fought, and how, and where, who did command ?
My lady hath, like a sweet sentinel,
Watched from her window all the livelong night
To greet our absent lord. Was nothing known ?

REUB. When we of wit and wisdom sit around
The benches of our inn, with flagons filled,
There's nought unknown in such brave company.
What truth denies a little lying grants ;
And many a rousing story I can vouch
Hath taken root in a good draught of sack.

And, faith, there's virtue in old Muscatel ;
 For a good tale is better told in wine
 Than any ale a-brewing hereabouts.

MAR. If all you know springs from the tavern wine,
 I prithee straightway take yourself to rest.

REUB. My head is clear, I can a tale relate—

MAR. The Lady Elvestine will come anon,
 And I would not she saw you in this plight.

REUB. (*drawing himself up*). Plight, sayest thou—nay ; I will
 wager thee

A crown that I can crack another cup,
 And yet no word shall trip its fellow up.
 Come, give 't a trial—nay, be not so discreet.

MAR. The dawn is near, and you must rise betimes ;
 Vex not my lady by thus tarrying.

REUB. Vex Lady Elvestine ! Not for the world ;
 Still, a good tale, like wine, should not be hid.

MAR. At noon to-morrow, or at eventide,
 There will be leisure to recount your tale.
 Why, your lids droop from very drowsiness.
 Rest you till morn.

REUB. Well, well, I will to bed ;
 But, my good Marie, you look tired and pale.

MAR. I shall to rest when my dear mistress wills.
 Good-night ! You know your way across the court ?

REUB. Aye ; on a single plank stretched o'er the moat
 I would walk blindfold. So, good-night !

MAR. Good-night ! (*He half staggers off.*)

I am right glad my lady did not come
 To see him thus ; it would have troubled her.
 What grief hath sat upon her aching heart
 Since my lord left ! Would I could comfort her !

(*Goes to door and listens.*)

I hear her step—she's ever on the watch
 To catch the slightest sound of his approach.

(*Enter ELVESTINE.*)

Dear mistress, I was now about to come——

ELV. Have you heard news of him—hath aught appeared ?

MAR. Rumours there are of a great victory ;
 A desperate battle, nobly fought and won.

ELV. Won by King Monmouth—aye, it must be so !
 My lord was always in the cause of right.
 His arms will prosper. I have prayed for it.

MAR. Our daily prayers are for thy gracious lord.

(*Clock strikes Three.*)

ELV. What hour was that, Marie ?

MAR. It should be three.

ELV. Hark ! There ! (*Listens.*) Did you not hear a sigh of
 pain ;
 A low, half-stifled cry ? Hark ! There, again !
 As if some wounded man would seek our help,
 Yet fearful lest he meet an enemy ?
 Oh ! Can it be my lord ?

MAR. Nay, mistress dear,
 'Twas but the idle crooning of the wind.
 On stormy nights, like this, the dead leaves rise,

And whisper as they whirl about the walk,
And spin athwart the chase. Indeed, 'twas nought.

ELV. Tell me, again, the tidings that you heard.
In ev'ry wisp the drowning man sees help,
And Reuben's babble strangely comforts me.

MAR. Last night, they say, the King near Sedgemoor camped,
With Buyse, and Grey, and doughty Ferguson ;
The very flow'r of knightly chivalry.

ELV. (*looking at a map*). Near Sedgemoor, say you. Here
should be the place ;
And here my dearest lord, by Monmouth's side,
Would meet the Papist James. See you, Marie,
The road lies in the hollow—'twixt two hills.
Mayhap the battle here was fought and won,
And the young king, with pride of vict'ry flushed,
Hath marched his horse and foot across the plain.

MAR. With all my heart I pray it may be so.

ELV. Before the sun peers o'er the misty ridge,
Bathing the tall pines in pale amber sheen,
My dearest love may take me to his breast,
And from my heart ring out a jubilee.

MAR. Our hearts will all rejoice at his return.

ELV. How grand and brave he looked—how manly, handsome !
The foolish tears would come into mine eyes
At thought of parting even for a day,
And I did faint from fear, lest I had sent
Him forth to certain death. I prayed to God
To send him safely back, till in my heart

There grew a sweet content ; and I looked up
And saw him ride away on Marmaduke.
Then pride broke out and overcame my grief,
And I was filled with selfish happiness,
To think he was my husband—lover—lord !

MAR. A braver gentleman ne'er drew a sword
For prince, and home, and true religious faith.

ELV. (*making a sign of silence, and listening*). Methought I
heard the beat of horse's hoofs.

MAR. No sound breaks on mine ear.

ELV. 'Twas fancy born.
'Twas but a hope that blossomed from desire,
As one would wish the sun at harvest time,
Or rain upon the pensive daffodils.
A hundred times an hour I hear his step,
And catch the merry ripple of his laugh.

MAR. And he will come—

ELV. Yes, he will come anon.

(*Goes to window and opens shutters.*)

But see, the storm is o'er—and yonder breaks
The tender gray that tops the hills at dawn,
Giving glad promise of a bright noontide.
It fills my soul with hope and speechless joy,
And I could weep for very happiness.

MAR. Forgive me, mistress—but since day hath broke—

ELV. I can divine your thought—get you to bed—

MAR. Dear mistress, 'twas of you my bold thoughts ran.

ELV. I will keep watch and vigil till the morn :
 Be not afraid to leave me here alone ;
 In sooth, I shall not lack of company.
 I'll people this old room with memories,
 And hold fond converse with my absent lord.

MAR. Nay, if it be your wish——

ELV. Good night ; dear child. (*Kisses her.*)

MAR. Madam, good night, I will be up betimes.

ELV. I will come to you, ere I go to bed.

MAR. (*aside*). May Heav'n guard and shield her from all woe.

(*Exit*).

ELV. Let me remember—Was it yesternight
 My foolish thoughts, by reason quite unchid,
 Took me in fancy to last Eastertide,
 When I was first beloved ? 'Twas blessed Spring ;
 Glad song-birds filled the air with joyous note,
 And little blossom'd lives peep'd shyly forth ;
 The blue-bell, snowdrop, and the violet ;
 While primroses, in happy council grouped,
 Turned their bright faces to their nearest kin,
 The slender cowslips, as if to welcome them.
 All nature seemed to smile upon our love ;
 And as we walked adown the tangled ways,
 Our throbbing hearts filled with dumb ecstasy——

(*Tap at the window.*)

Who's there ?

ARCH. (*outside*). Open, dear wife !

ELV.

'Tis Archibald !

My dearest lord has now returned to me !

(*She opens the window. Enter ARCHIBALD, LORD MARSTON, pale and travel-stained ; he closes the shutters.*)

O God ! what has befall'n—your clothes are rent,
There's blood upon your face—my love—my love,
Some great disaster has o'ertaken you !

ARCH. Speak lower for your life, dear Elvestine !

ELV. What peril dogs your steps ? Are you pursued ?

ARCH. Our cause is lost, and Monmouth put to flight.

The bloodhound Churchill has been loosed on us.

ELV. You have been hurt ! Your face is blanched with pain !

ARCH. 'Tis but a scratch—indeed, indeed, 'tis nought.

ELV. Forgive me, love. Oh, would that I had died
Before I sent you forth !

ARCH. "Twas bravely done.

ELV. Rest here, fond heart, and I will tend on you.

ARCH. Are all asleep ?

ELV. Marie has just retired.

Give me your hand—I'll make you up a couch
Where, dear one, you can ease your weary limbs ;
Lean all your weight on me—so—do not fear.

(*Leads him to couch. He is about to speak.*)

Now, until you have quaffed a cup of wine
You shall not ope your lips—nay, not a word—
I am your doctor, and will be obeyed. (*Gets wine.*)
(*Aside*) How my heart bleeds to look upon his face

ARCH. (*aside*). Sooner than she should suffer, I would die !

ELV. Here is the wine, my dearest—Burgundy ;
There's life in ev'ry ruby drop of it ;
Nay, nay, I do entreat, till you have drunk. (*He drinks.*)
Now, let me bind your wounds, and stanch the blood ;
I'll prove a gentle nurse.

ARCH. Hark ! Didst not hear ?

ELV. 'Twas but your fancy—all are fast and sound.

ARCH. While I have life they shall not capture me !

(ELVESTINE cuts his coat-sleeve.)

O God, the agony !

ELV. (*kissing him*). My dearest lord,

I did not mean to cause you so much pain.

ARCH. 'Twas but a twinge—'tis gone—take comfort, love.

ELV. Your brow is feverish, and your pulses throb.

ARCH. I care not for myself—the common cause
Hath over-topped my woe.

ELV. (*tending his wound*). Tell me of that.

ARCH. You know from Argyle we expected aid ?

ELV. He did not fail ?

ARCH. Turned traitor as I live !

ELV. The shameless coward ! What befell you then ?

ARCH. At Bridgewater, there joined us not a few
Whose hearts ne'er knew a sign of childish fear.

ELV. Brave men of Somerset, loyal and true.

ARCH. From the church-tow'r we viewed the Papist camp,
And counted on a bloodless victory.
Our plan was this—to wait till eventide,

And fall upon the horse of Feversham ;
But treason stalked unseen within our camp——
These plans were known, and, on the first attack,
A murd'rous volley greeted our thin ranks,
And swept down horse and foot.

ELV. Oh, terrible !

ARCH. The worst of all remains—King Monmouth fled,
Leaving his comrades to defeat and death.
For hours we fought, but 'twas of no avail ;
Our scattered, undrilled ranks could make no stand,
And nought was left but flight. Since yesternight,
Like hunted stags who hear the yelping hounds,
We shaped our course o'er woodland, hill, and dale !

Elv. Faced you the raging storm? Oh, Heav'n forbid!

ARCH. Indeed, t'was fearful !

Elv. You found shelter, love?

ARCH. Midnight had rung—the ghostly bell still warm,
Its watch-note echoing from hill to hill,
When, my limbs aching and my brain a-fire,
I crept into the gorse—a tangled lair—
And laid me down to wait the coming day.

Elv. But not alone—your comrades—

ARCH. They had fled.

O God, how silent 'twas ! Nature seemed tranced ;
The falling leaf in terror turned its face
Till 'neath the matted grass with pale companions.
Nought but a trickling brook, with plaintive sob,
Broke through the awful stillness of the night,

A stillness omen to the coming storm.

ELV. My dearest love, would I had been with you !

ARCH. 'Twas well, sweetheart, that you were safely housed.

Like a great snake, with ever-changing folds,
Now gray, now black, the arch of Heav'n appeared ;
From out the rift the forkèd lightnings flew,
Until the loud-voiced thunder shook the hills,
Making the big trees bend their heads with fear ;
Bolts like the fiend hissed back as i' their course—
(*Very distant trumpet heard*) What's that ?

ELV. 'Tis but the baying of a hound.

ARCH. It was the trumpet-call of Churchill's horse.

(*Faint call heard.*)

Hark ! There again ! Did you not hear the note ?

ELV. Our swineherd blows on such a horn. Mayhap—

ARCH. Mayhap, dear wife, this day will be my last,
For, by my soul, I will not yield my life
To meet a traitor's doom !—

ELV. Why should you fear,
When, dearest, at the worst your father's aid—

ARCH. My father's service to the late King Charles
Will not avail me now. But let them come.

(*Draws his sword.*)

Oh, Heav'n ! (*His sword drops from his hand, and he staggers as if about to fall. ELVESTINE catches and helps him to the couch.*)

ELV. Your wounds do bleed afresh—rest here—

(*She stanches wound.*)

ARCH. There is a faintness creeping o'er my heart,
And mine eyes dim as if Death's heavy hand
Were weighing on my lids.

ELV. 'Tis balmy sleep,
Not death, that woos you to forgetfulness.

ARCH. I must not sleep, my honour is at stake ;
And I would rather die a hundred deaths
Then fall into their hands alive. God, no !
The cause I loved has been by Monmouth's flight
Turned to so base a plot, I would that death
Had come to me ere this !

ELV. Say not so, love,
And try to welcome sleep, for with it grief
And pain, and trouble, will be gone.

ARCH. Nay, nay—
Were I to yield, and drowse beneath the touch
Of the magician Sleep, though from my heart
This ache might pass, and all be peace within,
I should but wake to face a death of shame.

ELV. I will watch over you—your honour's mine :
Dear husband, rest you now—lean gently back—
Your head upon the silken cushion—so—
And I will summon you should aught appear,
Aught that betokens danger to your life.

ARCH. Will you do this?

Elv. Indeed, I will.

ARCH. Nay, more.
Will you, before your Maker, take an oath

To place my dagger close within my grasp,
So that, at need, I can dispatch me straight?

ELV. Come, love, compose yourself.

ARCH. Will you swear this?

ELV. I promise; but you must not think of death.

ARCH. Nay, *swear't*, before your husband and your God!
I do not doubt you, but I know your love.

ELV. I love you more than life, my Archibald.

ARCH. I know it, sweet, so I would have thine oath.

Should danger come while I am clasped in sleep,
Swear to do that which I have asked of you;
And, should I fail, yourself to do the deed,
Sheathing this dagger in my very heart.

(ELVESTINE *shudders.*)

Now swear, and prove yourself a brave, true wife.

ELV. As you did swear to love and cherish me,
I, in my turn, swear before you and God,
From sleep to rouse you at the first alarm,
Placing your dagger straight within your grasp. (Pause.)

ARCH. The rest, dear love, the rest——

ELV. Must I swear that?

ARCH. If you care aught for me.

ELV. You are my life.

ARCH. Then boldly take what is thine own—come—swear!

ELV. (aside). I must, to ease his heart.

ARCH. Come, dearest, swear!

ELV. Should your strength fail you, at your sorest need,
'Fore Heav'n I swear—though it prove death to me—

That I will strike this dagger to your heart !

(Covers her face with her hands.)

ARCH. I have no fear since you have sworn to this.

Kiss me, dear one, and say a prayer for me.

ELV. May God, my fondest love, watch over you,
And bright dreams tend your sleep.

(Covers him with cloak, and kisses him.)

ARCH. Kiss me again. (She does so.)

Now let me look into thy beauteous face,
So that my dreams may take their shape from thee.

ELV. And I will think of you, my dearest lord,
As I do ever.

ARCH. (drowsily). We will dream of love,
Our happy wooing-time—when budding trees—
And the rich bloom—be true, dear Elvestine.

ELV. I will be true. (His head droops.) Sleep hath o'ertaken him.
I cannot choose but gaze upon his face,
And note the cruel change since we did part ;
He was so noble, bonny, brave, and true,
As bright and gladsome as the lark at morn :
The flood of health was at its very full,
And nought but parting dimmed our happiness.
O God ! send back the strength of yesterday,
The crimson tide that bears sweet life with it,
Which now hath ebbed, and left him like to die.

(Gently smoothes his hair.)

There is an' angry frown upon his brow
I fain would charm away. When little babes

Are restless in their sleep, and start with pain,
The patient nurse croons out a lullaby ;
I'll hum the tune he loves to comfort him.

(*Sings in hushed, plaintive tones :*)

The scented breath of a half-blown rose,
Or the pipe of a meadow thrush ;
The rippling brook where the kingcup grows
Within sight of the nodding rush ;
The falling leaf with its gentle sigh,
Or the smithy's echoing ring ;
The rook's loud caw and the shepherd's cry,
Sweet memories back to us bring.

The frown is gone—the look of pain has fled.

(*Sings :*)

The tender light at the fall of day,
Or the shape of a fleeting cloud ;
The snowy show'r of rich bloom in May,
Or the ferryman's laughter loud ;
The stately bow of the whisp'ring trees,
As they list while the wavelets sing ;
The droning hum of the restless bees,
Sweet memories back to us bring.

There is a happier look ; now he is smiling—
Dreaming of me, mayhap—dreaming of me.

(*Kisses his forehead gently. Trumpet heard nearer.*)

That fearful note ! It sounds upon the hill.

(*Goes to window and opens shutters. Morning light breaks in.*)

Heavenly pow'rs, 'tis *Feversham's* Light Horse !
Can they divine that he is sheltered here ?
They call a halt ; and now they shape their course
Towards the beaten road which straighway leads
Up to our home. Oh, untold agony ;
Anguish unbearable—what shall I do ?
If I but wake him—then with desperate haste
My dearest lord will rid himself of life.
If he sleep on, helpless they'll track him down,
And he will die a traitor's death of shame.
Ye spirits of wisdom, honour, duty, love,
Advise me what to do ; lend me your aid ;
I am a woman, dearly loving him ;
A wife, whose arms have circled him about,
And on whose breast his aching head hath lain.
I shrink from that which I have sworn to do,
Not knowing what may hap ! Oh, misery !
There is a peaceful look upon his face.
Yet now, methinks, there is a dumb reproach
So piteous. Dear love, come whatsoe'er,
I'll do thy bidding. Waken, husband, wake.

(*Lays her hand on his arm.*)

ARCH. (*in sleep*). Pour out a volley on the foremost ranks.

ELV. Dreaming of battle—My dear lord, awake !

ARCH. (*dreamily*). Who calls on me—Is it an angel's voice ?

ELV. 'Tis I, your wife !

ARCH. Ah, Elvestine, fond heart ! (*Tries to move.*)

My limbs are powerless, I cannot stir !

ELV. I'll help you up——

ARCH. (*looking at her*). Then they are close at hand?

Turn not away your face, but quickly speak——

My honour, and thine own, rest on thy words;

Dear wife, the truth—for pity's sake—the truth!

ELV. The horse of Feversham are on the road.

ARCH. Coming this way? The truth—dear love—the truth!

ELV. They come, in haste, this way.

ARCH. My dagger, sweet;
I may have strength to die by mine own hand;
Come, haste, dear heart—the dagger—give't me. Quick!

ELV. I cannot give it; you are life to me!

ARCH. Then should my honour be as dear to you,
As very life itself.

ELV. And so it is,
It is, dear Archibald!

ARCH. Yet you draw back
And let me plead in vain.

ELV. You shall not die.
There is the passage underneath the moat,
Where you can hide until the search is o'er;
Come rest on me, and I will lead you there!
Haste, dearest love!

ARCH. If I could reach the vault,
It would but lengthen out my misery.
Let me die here—come, come—the dagger, quick!

ELV. You must not die.

ARCH. If I am ta'en alive
My name will be a bye-word in the land,

And gossip tongues will echo it abroad,
'For a vile King, who loved his mistress best,
He met a traitor's death on Tower Hill.'
My God ! I hear the rabble hooting me,
And see a thousand faces all upturned—
Oh, better twenty deaths ! (*Drum heard.*) Heard you
that drum ?

ELV. I love you so. Can I not die for you ?
Anguish, or pain, or torture, I could bear.
Plunge, then, the dagger in *my* heart. (*Gives dagger.*)

ARCH. Come death !

(*Tries to stab himself. ELVESTINE turns away with a cry.*)
I have no strength to drive the weapon home.
Now, dearest, strike !

ELV. No, no !

ARCH. Thine oath—thine oath.
Thou hast sworn to do this thing.

ELV. I was distraught,
And knew not what I said. I cannot take
The treasured life I love more than mine own.
As well might ask a mother kill her babe,
And watch its dying struggles with a smile——

ARCH. Remember, God hath registered thine oath.

If we part now, 'tis but to meet up yon,
Where we shall live an endless life of joy.
I know you linger, dear, for love of me ;
But show your love by freeing me from pain.

ELV. Oh no, it is too terrible a deed.

Kill him I fondly love——

ARCH. Dear Elvestine,

‘The ivy clings more closely to the oak,
E’en to the killing of the thing it loves,
When cruel storms would burst the tender bonds.’

(*Knock at outer door.*)

Haste ! haste, ere they break in !

Be brave, dear wife.

ELV. I stand upon the brink of an abyss,
Fearing to plunge. I care not for myself,
So I can lift the burden from your heart.

ARCH. Then strike ! Your deed shall prove a monument.
The women yet unborn shall praise your name
And syllable your goodness. Do not fear.

(*Knock repeated.*)

ELV. There is a tempest raging in my soul,
A bitter struggle against pleading love.
So hard a task ne’er fell to wisely hands !
Look not so piteous ; seal up thine eyes,
I cannot strike you while their fond light shines.
Now, as a sign of pardon, kiss me, love.

ARCH. (*kissing her.*) Take courage, dearest heart—now fare thee well. (*Knock repeated and voices heard.*)

ELV. Alive they shall not take you, Archibald !
I set you free !

(*Stabs him. He smiles as he draws her to him, kisses her forehead, then falls back dead.*)

(ELVESTINE *flings open the door, and COLONEL DRUMMOND enters.*)

ELV. Now take him—there he lies,
Unmindful of thine errand ; take the dead !

DRUM. The dead, dear Elvestine ! Oh, say not that—
My hasty errand is to bring you peace.

ELV. Peace—art mocking me ?

DRUM. No, upon my soul !
For I recalled to James those services
This good lord's father rendered to King Charles ;
I pledged my life he would not err again.
My prayers were heard—the King has pardoned him.

ELV. Pardon ! Come you to gibe and jeer at me ?
Look in my face, and read the inward grief
That feeds upon my heart. The dead is here,
The hallowed, sainted dead—yet you can jest !

DRUM. As God is over us, dear Elvestine,
I do not jest—this packet from King James—

ELV. The King—the King, say you—Come give it me.
(*Takes packet and reads.*)
'Tis true ! I wronged you, 'tis all plainly writ :
A pardon—pardon—(*Laughing.*) My dear lord,
awake !
Come, wake ! unclose your lids, and speak to me ;
Your life shall not be forfeited—see here
The written pardon—dearest love, awake !
(*With a cry.*) Awake ! Ah, never more will he awake !
'Tis I have been his executioner !

DRUM. No, no, dear Elvestine, it cannot be !

ELV. This heavy crime I laid upon my soul,
Thinking to save him from a death of shame.
Father of Mercy, wilt thou pardon me—
Wilt send him back—restore him to these arms ?
He is not dead ! He must not, shall not die !

DRUM. Oh, Elvestine !

ELV. (at the body). Hush ! Stand aside—he wakes.

Pillow your head, dear lord, here on my breast.
I will be your nurse,—so gentle, loving—
I will anticipate your lightest thought
And chase away thine anguish. See, he smiles,
My lullaby hath soothed him—I'll sing again.
(Sings a note or two of the song, then kisses his forehead.)
How cold ! Oh, 'tis the icy touch of death !
Death ! Now all comes back ; 'twas I who killed him
I plunged the dagger deep into his heart ;
I robbed him of the priceless hours of life—
The blood is on my hand !

DRUM. Oh, misery !

ELV. I prithee stand away. Back, back I say.
Now let God's vengeance fall upon my head !
I pray for death ; 'tis fit that I should die.
Are all the thunders in the Heaven spent ?
The bolts that scathe the guiltless, where are they ?
Where are the lightnings now to strike me dead ?

DRUM. Heavenly powers—alas, she is distraught !

ELV. Wilt thou not come ? I do await thee here.

Death, thou sweet solace to a broken heart,
Oh, come to me ; come to this aching breast !
Thou wilt not—then I will come to thee !
This dagger, jewelled with his precious blood,
Rest here.

DRUM. Nay, nay, you shall not !

ELV. (stabbing herself). It is past !

(She totters. DRUMMOND catches and supports her.)

DRUM. O, God ! restore her—give her back to life !

ELV. Grieve not, there was no living joy for me :
My lord had gone before—now he awaits.
My dearest love, I answer to thy call ;
Death hath ta'en pity, and I follow thee !

(Clings fondly to the body and dies.)

CUPID'S MESSENGER
A COMEDY
IN ONE ACT.

Characters.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.
MARY HERBERT (*his sister*).
FANNY WALSINGHAM.
LUCETTE.

Period—*Elizabethan.*

Place—*Mansion of Sir Francis Walsingham.*

TO

FREDERICK SANDYS

This Play is Dedicated,

AS A TOKEN OF GRATITUDE FOR THE MANY MARKS OF SYMPATHY

AND ENCOURAGEMENT SHOWN BY HIM TO

THE AUTHOR.

1883.

SCENE.—*Room in SIR FRANCIS WALSINGHAM'S mansion.*

FANNY WALSINGHAM and LUCETTE *discovered.* FANNY *is working at her tambour.* LUCETTE *is reading to her.*

LUCETTE (*reading*) :

AND it so fell out, as King Richard slept
Upon this fateful eve, there came to him—
As portents and sad omens of the fight—
Disturbing dreams, which weighed upon the sleeper.
And ghostly visitants pry'd round his couch ;
Dead Clarence, Buckingham, and the Lady Anne,
Who mocked at him, and with their bony hands
Pointed to Richmond's tent, so vanishéd.
Then, with a cry for mercy, Richard woke—

FAN. Enough, enough, Lucette, I can perceive
The horror of his mind o'ercharged with crime.
Men steep'd in deeds of blood are ever frightened
With lurking shadows, and pale fantasies ;
But I'm aweary of this history.
There is a sadness creeping o'er my heart
Which I would charm away with mirth and song ;

I prithee take thy lute, and sing to me
 Some strain of tender witching melody,
 To still this ache.

Luc. Let not my thought seem bold,
 If I divine the cause of thy sad looks,
 And urge a reason for thy weariness.
 Sir Philip—

FAN. Hush, 'twould be unmaidenly
 To own his coldness caused a single pang.
 LUC. If I misjudge him not, this chillness springs
 From his great love of poetry.

FAN. Lucette,
 I can but take small comfort from the thought,
 Though he indites his love poesy to me.
 LUC. As in good sooth he does—indeed—indeed.
 Ah, mistress dear, I'll sing a song to thee,
 Shall bring the sunlight to thy heart again.
 FAN. You mean *his* song—the 'Birth of Love.'
 LUC. The sun begins to shine. I prithee list.

Song.

The dew-bent flow'rs were sleeping fast,
 In the pearly light of morn,
 When the soft winds whispered—'It is past,'
 And the infant Love was born ;
 And the birds sent up a song of praise,
 For his spell was all around,
 And they circled in a giddy maze,
 As they made the hills resound.

And the wild beast in its tangled lair,
Now felt the touch of his wand ;
And every youth, and maiden fair,
Rejoiced in the sacred bond.
E'en the big trees nodded in their joy
To the fleeting clouds above,
As they mutely said this new-born boy
Was the infant god of Love.

LUC. Hath not my rhyme, strong antidote to sadness,
Charmed from thy heart these misty webs of doubt ?
(*FANNY sighs.*)

Be sure, kind mistress, that he loves thee well.

FAN. Could I believe—

LUC. Take comfort from the thought—

FAN. It comforts me to know I'm loved by thee ;
From thy fond words of gentle sympathy
I take more cheer than from a hundred rhymes ;
Dearest companion, friend of childhood's hour.

(*Kisses her.*)

Thy music hath awakened in my heart
A wistful yearning after solitude.
Bright hopes, and dreams, and sweet imaginings,
Unfold their tendrils when the mind is shut
To outward things. I fain would be alone,
That I might build, in fancy, stately palaces,
With leafy groves, peopled with singing birds,
And gardens, where the flow'rs should fill the air

With their rich perfume, to joy my absent love.

Luc. Dear mistress, he will come.

FAN. Yea, yea, he will.

Luc. (*aside*). I will not cross her wish by tarrying,

She were best left alone to nurse her grief.

Dear lady!—Heaven keep her from all harm.

(*Exit.*)

FAN. 'Yea, he will come'—my Philip, he will come.
 Ever the self-same burden to my song.
 Hope seeds, and blossoms, and at last decays,
 And when Spring comes the sap stirs not to life;
 So is't with me. I wait and wait in vain.
 At Kenilworth, scarce twenty miles from hence,
 He sojourneth. There he doth daily tilt
 For other dames, young, rich, and beautiful
 (So Rumour's gossip tongue gives out to all);
 Nor comes, nor sends a messenger to me.
 Hath he in one short month forgot the love—

(*Laughter heard outside.*)

MARY (*outside*). I need no chamberlain. My laughter, friend—
 Like to the jingle of a jester's bells—
 Shall herald mine approach! Nay, do not mind.
 (*Entering.*) Sweet coz, how fares it?

FAN. Welcome, Mary dear.

MARY. Alack-a-day, what aileth thee?

FAN. (*with a sigh*). 'Tis nothing.

MARY. And so for nothing you look sad—and sigh?

Why, what a roguish, all one-sided bargain!

Thy face doth wear so piteous a guise,
I never saw the like indeed—save once.
'Twas in my father's jester, Peter Snipe,
Who had so gorged with venison and carp
That he was like to choke. I see him now—
Tears in his eyes—the picture of despair.
I never shall forget the look of pain
That overspread his purple pimpled face ;
'Twas like to thine, save for this difference :
His watery look presag'd a solid fear,
While thine is based on airy nothingness.

FAN. Nothingness, say'st thou ?

MARY. Thine own word, i' faith.
When I did ask but now, what aileth thee,
Thine answer was (*with a mock sigh*), 'Tis nothing.

FAN. Nay, dear coz—

MARY. Alack, if maids woo'd, won, and wedded nothing,
What phantom heritors would our children be !

FAN. Thy merry jests and happy rippling laughter
Would scare a heavier pensiveness than mine.

MARY. 'Tis now a month since I have looked on thee,
But, oh ! the change. There's some enchantment, coz,
Unless 'tis love. And now methinks the blood
Mounts to thy pallid cheek, and thy fring'd lashes
Lie close upon their lids, seeming to say—
'Inquisitor, thou shalt not learn my secret !'
Thy sickness is the malady called love,
Which simple maidens take incautiously.

I know it, by a hundred proven signs,
All catalogued in Cupid's pharmacy.
My brother is the cause of this, thy sadness ;
Have I not said the truth ? Deny it not.

FAN. Indeed, it is the truth !

MARY. What is amiss ?

FAN. He hath not bent his steps towards our home,
Or sent a greeting for this many a day.
At Kenilworth he tarries : there they say,
'Mid sports and games, he pens love roundelays
To the rich Dowager, Countess Prendergast.

MARY. His muse would play the truant evermore,
If to that lean and antiquated dame
He penn'd a sonnet, or composed an ode.
Oh, what a plaguy thing is jealousy !

FAN. Dost think he loves me still ?

MARY. In good sooth, aye ;
But to make sure, I will invent some plan
Shall bring him to a parley for thy hand.

FAN. For my hand, cousin ?—say'st thou for my hand ?

MARY. Aye, for thy *two* hands, an thou like that best,
And for thine eyes, and lips, and beating heart,
He shall make bid for all.

FAN. Is this a jest ?

MARY. No ; as I am unfurnished with a beard,
I wish I knew a fiercer oath to swear by.

FAN. But when will he return ?

MARY. To-day.

FAN. To-day ?

MARY. My brain begins to stir——

FAN. Said you to-day ?

MARY. Why wilt thou interrupt ?

FAN. I am o'erjoyed,
And happiness will speak.

MARY. Now listen, coz.
My plan, like a young starling all unfledg'd,
Hath chipp'd its shell. Art listening ?

FAN. With my whole heart.

MARY. Alack, I'd rather thou wouldest give thine ears !

FAN. And I shall see him—hear his voice to-day ?

MARY. And be rewarded for thy constancy,—
And meek humility, with a chaste kiss.
But to my new-born plan.

FAN. Proceed, dear cousin.

MARY. Well, thus my weighty project breaks on me.
My brother hath not looked upon my face,
Come Martinmas, for nearly two long years.
(Long to a maid in love, as thou art, coz.)
He hath no expectation of my coming,
Which, for my purpose, falls out passing well.
His disposition hath a jealous tinge
—As thine hath, Fanny—and were he to learn,
That some gailant had sought thy dainty hand,
His blood might counsel such unbridled deeds
As could be shaped to thine advantage, child.

FAN. I do not understand.

MARY.

Then to be plain.

I will attire myself in hose, and doublet,
And as a page, attending some great noble ;
Such as my Lord of Suffolk, or Earl Leicester,
The doughty Warwick, or gay Cumberland,
Make him belieye I am Love's Messenger ;
And so provoke his slumbering passion,
That he will timely rouse, and worship thee,—
And I'll be sworn, ere the new moon,
Thou'l be my sister, and his wedded wife.

FAN. But is this maidenly ?

MARY.

As a matron, aye !

Maids must win husbands, when they are in love,
By all the cunning of their simple hearts.—
'Tis fit it should be so, dear foolish coz.
A man—trust one who knows—is only caught
By careful study of his temperament :
Fashioning thy wit, thy modesty, thy guile,
—Like a church vane, that moves with ev'ry wind—
To catch his changeful humour. Note his moods.
When he is coy—a virtue rare in men—
With his best rival dance a minuet :—
'Twill be the surest way to loose his tongue.
When sad, affect a winsome playfulness,
That shall do more to win him from his spleen
Than plaintive sighs, or tearful sympathy.
If he should yawn, and weariness display,
Incite him to some deed of chivalry,

By urging :—‘ Thus my lord of So-and-so did ;
Or take thy lute, and strum a melody,
Or aught, to quicken his dull lagging pulse—
But if withal, he melts not i’ the sun,
Still freezing ’neath thy studied blandishments,
Why then—

FAN. What then, dear coz ?

MARY. Why, then, poor chick,
Tell him go seek the nearest gallows tree,
And straight-way hang himself ! ’Tis a fit end.
But hark—Good sooth, I hear my brother’s voice !

FAN. (*listening*). Yes, yes, ’tis he—Oh, Mary—

MARY. Come with me,
And I will tell thee further of my plot ;
'Tis meet thou should’st know all.

FAN. But I’m afear’d—
MARY. Be not afear’d to trust me with a sword ;
I swear I’ll use it but in my defence,
And I will wear it, with as bold a front,
As any blatant gasconading jack—
But come, I hear his step.—

FAN. How my heart beats !

MARY. I’ll make it dance right merrily, I wis,
Ere the sun points three-quarters on the dial !
Oh, what a lagging weary steed is love,
When it lacks provender ! Go, get thee in. (*Exeunt.*)

(*Enter* LUCETTE, *showing in* SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.)

LUC. I will apprise my lady of thy coming,

If thou wilt tarry here.

PHIL. I prithee say
Sir Philip Sidney fain would kiss her hand,
And bend the knee in knightly courtesy.

LUC. I will convey you so. (Exit.)

PHIL. How went the verse ?

I cannot shake the rhythm from mine ear,
It clings about my sense.—Their pearly freight—
It was not so, and yet, 'twas very like.
Their pearly—I should have't about me, here !

(*Looks for it in his tablets.*)

By'r Lady, it was in my tablet writ !
Ah—so—'tis found. (*Reads.*) Their *opal* freight unladen,
Heaven's galleons make sail to the far East,
And, as they float in squadrons o'er the land,
The big trees shyly wave their feathery tops,
As if they claimed, in recognition mute,
A brief acquaintance. The blackbird and the thrush,
Their hearts a-throbbing, sing for very joy ;
And the great commonwealth of shrubs and flow'rs,
Intoxicate with the soft balmy rain,
Kiss one another as they 'twine and mesh.
A pretty rhyme, and true, methinks, to nature.
How oft have I, while braving summer showers,
Noted these tender signs of thankfulness,
In flower, and bird !—And then it seemed to me,
These little lives of perfume, and of song,
Looked up reproachfully, as if to say,

Unthankful man, learn from us gratitude.

(*Takes out his tablets, and writes. Enter FANNY WALSINGHAM; he does not perceive her.*)

FAN. (*aside*). Richly apparel'd he doth come to me,
As if some festival had claimed his presence ;
And even now, his mind hath taken flight,
To distant scenes, where she perchance holds court.
Oh—if the test should fail !—

PHIL. Your pardon, pray.

FAN. 'Tis *I* should ask for pardon—frighting thy muse—

PHIL. Nay, 'twas but a wing'd thought I fain would cage.

FAN. And I have let it 'scape into the air—

PHIL. 'Tis better so—believe me it was poor.

FAN. (*aside*). His voice sounds hard and cold, but I'll not heed.

(*Aloud*) I prithee sit.

PHIL. Dear lady—by your leave.

(*Proffers her a chair; pause.*)

FAN. (*aside*). He doth not speak, or even take my hand,

As he was wont—Oh, I feel like to weep.

PHIL. Rumour, they say, sweet, hath a busy tongue,
And, like the murmur of a far-off shout,
Marking a king's approach (which grows apace
And buries in tumultuous applause
The sense of spoken words) ofttimes blots out,
And hides, 'neath gather'd spite, our honest deeds.

FAN. I fain would follow, but my mind is lost,
In all the windings of thy paradox.

PHIL. Nay Fanny, 'tis the truth—no paradox.

FAN. And thou wouldest have me truly understand,
That wanton Rumour hath made sport with thee,
And, taking up the cry of thy brave deeds,
Hath wrongly shaped them to my distant ear?

PHIL. Saving thy presence—yes. At Kenilworth,
Where the great Dudley holds high festival,
—Chaining our presence with his boundless love—
I have been this full month; and now, unknown,
From this brave company, have sped away.

FAN. Methinks the Dowager Prendergast will fret,
And fume at thy disloyalty to her.

PHIL. My loyalty—I keep it for my queen,
The fairest flower in all nature's garden!

FAN. Forsooth, a pretty phrase. (*Aside*) He mocks at me.

PHIL. But, come, I prithee tell me of thyself.

FAN. The even travel of a maiden's life
Hath nought to furnish to a courtly ear.

PHIL. 'Twould pleasure mine, to learn the daily round
Of thy sweet life.

FAN. If I could well believe—

PHIL. Believe it, as I am a gentleman.

FAN. What shall I say?

PHIL. Say all that's in thy heart.

FAN. At early morn, awakened by the sun,
I rise, and pray—then hie me to the fount,

Where Gregory, our gardener, doth wait.

If I come not betimes, he gently chides,—

PHIL. Which, by St. Patrick, doth not often hap !

FAN. Then tend we on the flow'rs—the pansies first,

For they wake early, and are all athirst ;

Then the eglantine, roses, gillyflowers ;

And, last of all, the purple hollyhocks,

For they are lie-a-beds, and rouse not wi' the sun.

At eight o'clock we break our fast, and after,

I go tend my sick, and aged pensioners.

This brings the sun midway across the dial,

And I return to head the board at dinner.

The afternoon I spend in many ways ;

Sometimes I 'broider, or weave tapestry,

Or mount my jennet, or a-hawking go ;

And then, at even-tide, good Lucette sings,

Or reads some history, till supper-bell ;

And so, from day to day, we guile the time.

PHIL. A happy, simple life, which kings might envy.

FAN. Nay, nay, if kings did lead my even life,

Methinks their fame in hist'ry would find no page.

PHIL. The fame of kings in the Eternal Scroll,

Lives but a season's harvest. The reaper, Time,

Stills with his scythe, the lusty ripe-ear'd shouts,

The unsheathed smiles, the hollow stem of flatt'ry,

(Which stoops to every wind of favour)

And, ere the fall, the parasitic few

(Rank weedy placemen) drop off one by one,

Leaving the field of kingly memory,
A silent waste, for gleaning chroniclers.

(Enter LUCETTE, followed by MARY, disguised in
page's dress.)

LUC. Madam, this young Sir Page would speak with thee.

FAN. (aside). I had forgot—I'm like to die with shame !

MARY (aside). Methinks the tide of her heart's blood hath ebb'd,
And left her like to faint. But I'll be bold.

(Aloud.)

This packet, gracious lady, did my lord
Command me to deliver to thine hand.
And, further—should it please your ladyship—
To tarry for an answer.

FAN. (aside). I cannot speak.

MARY (aside). I scarce can keep a sober countenance.

LUC. (aside). I'd best retire. (Going.)

FAN. I prithee stay, Lucette.

PHIL. (to FANNY). A handsome, well-formed youth.

MARY (aside). How the man stares !
Hath he perceived, despite this brave outside,
That I'm a woman ?—Good sooth, that cannot be.
Perchance my 'broidered doublet sets awry,
Or hath my silken hose ungart'er'd come ?—
Oh, if that should be so !

FAN. (aloud). Young sir, wait here,
I will go pen an answer to thy lord,

And bring it thee.

MARY. Madam, I shall obey.

(*Aside*) I'll make obeisance in true knightly fashion,
Whatever doth betide. (*Bows constrainedly to FANNY.*)

FAN. Thy pardon, Philip;

Till I return, make light the passing time.

PHIL. I shall await you all impatiently.

FAN. (*to LUCETTE*). Come thou within. (*Aside*) Oh, what will
now befall?

(*Exeunt FANNY and LUCETTE.*)

PHIL. (*aside*). The fashion of his garb is strange to me,
What lordly master doth command his service?

MARY (*aside*). He plays the courtier at a country fair,
And speechless stares.—But I'll unlock his tongue,
And erst begin my merry comedy
By telling him the sort of man I am.

(*Aloud*).

Sir Knight—for such I guess thou'rt, by thine outward
show—

I fain would question thee.

PHIL. Say on, good youth.

MARY. First you must know, I am of quality,
Of parts, of breeding, and of good estate;
Next, that I'm here as Cupid's messenger.

PHIL. What sayest thou?

MARY (*aside*). Ha!—Now the play begins.

(*Aloud*) My question, sir,—if thou wilt lend thine ear—
Is of great moment.

PHIL. I prithee straight unfold.

MARY (*aside*). The bait hath ta'en—I'll play my fish awhile.

(*Aloud*) On second thoughts, perchance 'twould wiser be,
If I kept close my thoughts.

PHIL. Nay, nay, good youth—

MARY. My lord hath oft entreated me to caution,
And well I know—saving thy knightly presence—
A peacock front may hide a magpie tongue.

PHIL. But, my good youth—

MARY. It boots me to be wary.

PHIL. If you'd learn aught of Mistress Walsingham,
Know, I'm her counsellor, adviser, friend.

MARY (*aside*). Now that my hook hath fastened in his gills,
I'll strike, and spare not. (*Aloud*) Prithee pardon, sir,
If aught I've said hath given thee offence,
Impute it to my youth.—The matter's thus—

PHIL. (*aside*). What fear is this assails me ?

(*Aloud*) Speak on, fair youth.

MARY. As thou'rt a friend of Mistress Walsingham,
No doubt, 'twould pleasure thee to see her wed ?

PHIL. (*aside*). This question doth affright me.

MARY (*aside*). My plot works well—
He wriggles like an eel, but newly spear'd.

(*Aloud*) Thy silence doth approve so wise a deed.

Now, sir (*mimicking him*), as her adviser, counsellor,
friend,
And one who'd see her snugly dower'd and wed—

PHIL. Zounds, sir——

MARY. I prithee tell me, is she like
To make a patient, humble, loving wife,
To my most rich and bounteous master?

PHIL. (aside). I'm like to burst with spleen!

MARY (aside). Poor jealous fool,
He's all aflame—but I'll act out my part.
(Aloud) I prithee answer as the lady's friend.
And, yet, think of my lord—what tuneless discord,
Would his life be, if he did wive a shrew.

PHIL. (aside). This comes of tarrying with my lord of Leicester,
But I'll make good the time—an she will wed,
I'll straight to church—aye, by my troth, I will!

MARY (aside). Now to provoke his jealousy still further.
(Aloud) Brave sir, thine answer is of greatest moment,
For learn—as her adviser, counsellor, friend,
The packet I have even now delivered
Contained an offer for her queenly hand.

PHIL. Learn, young Sir Page—or whatsoe'er thou art,
This lady never will espouse thy lord.

MARY (aside). Ho! ho! now sports toward.

(Aloud) But why, Sir Knight

PHIL. Because, Sir Page, she is betrothed to me!

MARY. To thee! Alack-a-day—this likes me much!

I'd have thee know, Sir Knight, my noble lord
Is a right proper man.

PHIL. Who is thy lord?

MARY. A man of parts, Sir Knight, as thou wilt find—

A man of valour, wealth, and quality.

I am, as 'twere, a sprig of that fair tree,

And I would have thee know—we—I—my master,

Brook no trifling !

PHIL. Thou art a saucy knave !

MARY. Knave, sayest thou ?

PHIL. Aye, knave ! That was my word.

MARY (*aside*). I'll meet him with a bold and swaggering front.

(*Aloud*) Now, sir, by all the catalogue of saints—

PHIL. Well, sir, by all the saints, what wouldest thou do ?

MARY. By all the saints, aye, and the sinners too,

I'll avenge this insult with thy chastisement !

(*Aside*) An he look so, I shall e'en die of mirth.

PHIL. Thou art a very rash and headstrong youth.

MARY. Aye, sir, I'm choleric, as men know well.—

Thou hadst better take a tiger by the beard,

Or come between a leopardess and her cubs,

Or even with a hungry lion make sport,

Than face my uncurb'd rage ! Retract, Sir Knight,

Or as I'm a man, I'll spit thee, like a capon !

(*Draws her sword.*)

PHIL. Put up thy blade—I would not do thee harm.

MARY (*aside*). Now for a farewell flourish. (Aloud) Retract, I say,

And on thine oath, swear to give up this maid !

PHIL. That I will never do !

MARY (*making passes at him*). Then, sir, come on—

PHIL. If thou wilt have it so—why, then come to't.

(*Draws his sword—they make a few passes, when enter FANNY WALSINGHAM.*)

FAN. Forbear, I pray thee, gentles both, forbear.

PHIL. I crave thy pardon in all humbleness.

Believe me—

MARY. Believe him not, sweet lady,

This deadly fight was all by him provoked !

PHIL. As I'm a knight and English gentleman,

I swear the fault was his !

MARY. Then thou'rt forsworn !

FAN. Peace, prithee, peace,—Nay, nay, I do entreat.

Come sheath thy barb'rous weapons, and take heed

This is a lady's home—a place scarce meet

For an unmanner'd brawl.

PHIL. A just reproach,

Which, gracious lady, pains me more than blows.

MARY (*aside*). Now I have primed the petard, laid the train,

I'll let him fire the match. (*Aloud to FANNY*) Pray pardon me,

And think it not unseemly when I ask

If thou hast framed thine answer to my lord,

Who doth await it all impatiently.

FAN. Thou'l find mine answer in this packet writ.

Commend me to thy lord.

MARY. That will I, madam.

(*Aside to FANNY*) Look not so frightened, coz ; he loves thee well.

(*Aside*) Now straightway will he tender for her hand,
And swear to cherish her eternally.

(*Aloud*) I humbly take my leave.

Sir Knight, farewell.

Perchance, when next we meet, thou'l know me better.

(*Exit.*)

PHIL. Dear heart, forgive me this uncourtly strife.
If thou but knew'st the cause—

FAN. I do forgive.

PHIL. Ah, now thou hast unravel'd from my mind
The tangled skein of fear. I thank thee, sweet.

FAN. (*aside*). Doth his heart warm tow'rs me ? I can but tremble.

PHIL. I prithee, fond one, sit beside me here,
And I will tell thee how, since we did part,
—Like the bold flower, that motions with the sun—
My love hath followed thee.

FAN. Dost love me still ?

PHIL. Aye, dearest ; not like one by proxy 'trothed
(As kings and princes are), but with my soul !
I'd have thee for my wife.

FAN. Oh, say'st thou so ?

PHIL. The steepest point of my ambition lies
In winning thee. I'd have thy beauteous face—
Like a rare jewel of uncounted worth—
Ever about me. I'd wear thee like a badge

(By some great king for knightly deeds bestowed),

Nearest my heart—a shield against all harm.

Thy smile—a sunlit ripple, dancing playfully—

Would steal into the corners of my life,

My dearest love, and drive the shadows thence.

Thy sympathy, when Fortune turned her back,

Would, like the blessed rain on the parch'd grass,

Raise me to life and hope. And to serve thee

What happiness were that ! How dumbly fond,

Would I anticipate thy lightest yearnings !

I'd track thee in thy wish as silently

As phantom clouds, on summer moonlight nights,

Creep in battalions o'er the sleeping land :

I'd woo the crystal to divine thy thought,

And with astrologers hold starry counsels.

The sum of all my life I'd give to thee,

An thou wouldst answer—Philip, I'll be thine.

(*Pause.*) Wilt not upturn thy lids, and speak to me ?

FAN. If I seem lagging in my speech to thee,
Account it not that I hold light thy love.
The starving robin at first doth shyly look,
With wistful eyes, his little heart afeard,
When gentle hands spread out the tempting crumbs.
This joy hath come on me so suddenly,
I cannot give it tongue.

PHIL. My fondest love,
I prithee comfort thee.

FAN. Nay, let me weep.

There's a speechless comfort, when the heart is full,
In happy tears.

PHIL. Aye, love, indeed 'tis so—
All nature hath her liquid hour of joy.
The daisies wake with their eyes fill'd with tears ;
The slender grasses, and the sweet-breath'd briar—
When night hath shaded them from men's rude gaze—
Exhale big drops in silent ecstasy,
And e'en the rush, which all the livelong night,
Holds playful discourse with the weary stream,
Is caught a-weeping by the early sun.

(Enter LUCETTE, followed by MARY, dressed as she was at first.)

LUC. Dear madam, and Sir Knight—the Lady Herbert—

MARY. Alack-a-day ! here's a right merry meeting !

PHIL. Well met, dear sis. (LUCETTE retires.)

MARY. And thou too, brother mine.

Sweet coz, how fares it, since I saw thee last ?

Methinks it is an age—(Aside) Thine eyes bespeak

The joy that fills thy heart. I am right glad.

(Aloud) But what's amiss ? If I were not a woman,
I would swear some cruel wretch hath made thee
weep !

PHIL. I will confess, I am that wretch, dear sister.

FAN. Fond coz—

MARY (aside to FANNY). I prithee hold thy simple tongue !

(Aloud) I'll not stand by, and see thee thus abused,
Were he twice twenty thousand times my brother !

PHIL. But by my faith——

MARY. Wilt thyself justify,

And urge before the court extenuating pleas,
Such as, 'Your worship, I was much provoked,'
Or, 'Sooth, your worship, she was all to blame,'
As tipsy braggarts do who cuff their wives ?
Out on thee, man alive, if thou hast err'd ;
Down on thy knees, ask pardon for thy sin !

PHIL. This much, dear sister, I have deeply err'd ;
I should have claimed this lady for my bride
A month agone.

FAN. Nay, Philip, nay——

MARY (laughing). Ho ! ho !
Why, here's a brave to do ! Make her thy bride ?
Ho ! ho ! 'tis a good jest !

PHIL. 'Tis sober truth.

MARY. Ho ! ho ! This likes me much !

PHIL. I' faith, thou'rt gay.

MARY (assuming the page's voice and manner).

'Nay, sir, I'm choleric, as men know well—
Thou hadst better take a tiger by the beard,
Or come between a leopardess and her cubs,
Or even with a hungry lion make sport,
Than face my uncurb'd rage ! Retract, Sir Knight
Or, as I'm a man, I'll spit thee like a capon !

PHIL. Zounds ! what means this ?

FAN. Dear Philip——

MARY. Let me speak.

The meaning, dearest brother, I'll unfold,
If thou wilt lend thine ears.

PHIL. I am amazed.

MARY. Let thine amazement vanish with my words,
Which shall make plain my harmless masquerade.
This pretty lady—Nay, I'll spare thee, coz.

PHIL. Methinks I see thy roguish plot——

FAN. Forgive——

PHIL. Thou wert the saucy gasconading page——

MARY. 'First, you must know, I am of quality,
Of parts, of breeding, and of good estate,
Next, that I'm here as Cupid's messenger.'

PHIL. Try as I may I cannot choose but laugh——

MARY. Unless you weep, or look with gravity,
Or with a pleasant squiney, wink the eye !

PHIL. I prithee peace, and tell me, if thou canst,
Why thou didst play on me this hair-brained prank.

FAN. 'Twas for my sake.

MARY. Nay, coz, it was for *his*.

I donned the hose and doublet like a man,
To win for him a gentle, loving wife—
Indeed, it is the honest, simple truth.
And since my plot hath such a tuneful end—
Binding two hearts in happy unity—

Why, then, let's merry be, and speed the hour,
With mirthful rhymes, and spritish melody ;
And, ere sad night comes, warning us of bed,
I'll mark the day that is to see thee wed !

C R O M W E L L

A DRAMATIC FRAGMENT.

Characters.

OLIVER CROMWELL.

CHARLES I.

SCENE.—*Whitehall.*

CROMWELL :

WHEN you, Charles Stuart, at Westminster were
crowned,

And by your father's, and the nation's voice,
With one accord, named ruler of this land,
You took upon you with that kingly state,
The just defence of every subject's right.
You swore to be as father to the people,
And to all your children, whatsoe'er their race,
Serve, without favour, equal-handed justice.
For justice is more noble in a king
Than doughty deeds or rare munificence.
For these are but the shows of majesty,
And have no being when you cease to live.
But justice raises up above your grave
A time-defying monument of love ;
Wins for you honour, gratitude, respect,
Crowns all your actions with a grace Divine,
And makes you like unto the King of kings !

CHAR. And who is he that with so bold a tongue

Dares to impugn the justice of my acts ?
No man can say Charles Stuart laid a tax
Upon his people—Irish, Welsh, or Scotch—
But with one end—their happiness and peace !
I listen, sir, in wonder, all amazed,
That you can stand with an unblushing front,
And rail against the justice of your King.
By right Divine I hold my sovereign sway,
By God anointed, and to Him alone—

CROM. What is a king bereft of regal power,
And all the pomp and pride of majesty ?
Is he, by reason of his faculties,
And god-like scope, so placed above us all
That we should bow the head at his approach,
As if some sainted presence passed before ?
Are his thoughts greater, or his heart more true
Than thousands of his subjects, who, by toil,
Build up the grandeur of his sceptred sway ?
You claim a right Divine for sovereignty,
As if a mitred bishop could bestow,
By benediction, grace of kingliness !
The right Divine of an anointed king
Takes its divinity from the people's voice !
The cottager and tiller of the land,
The shepherd—aye, and he who guides the plough—
Help with their lives to cherish and uprear
Each new-born heir to costly monarchy !
Then when he fails in his enthronéd state

To justify the nation's love and trust,
He must be shorn of all prerogative,
And banished from the realm ! Strip off your robes,
And man to man, with God between us both,
Prove you deserve a people's clemency !

CHAR. To argue with the blind that light is light
Would not be greater folly, than to urge
Why I act thus or thus. I am a King,
And will not sue to an unmannered knave,
Who by false logic dominates the crowd,
And freely gives to every ill-born churl
The attributes and wisdom of a prince.

CROM. The common headsman might have been a king,
Wielding the sceptre with as firm a grasp
As now he wields the axe. No man so base,
But Time and Nature, happily conjoined,
Might raise him up to an exalted state,
As great as this you own—aye, greater far—
For germs of thought might in his mind be sown
That in the centuries would bud, and bloom,
And flourish when all kingly state was nought !

CHAR. As well might claim for every petty hill
The awful grandeur of the snowy Alps,
As say all men, however lowly born,
Might grace a monarch's throne. The base are base,
And neither Time nor Nature can stamp out
The grovelling instincts, petty turns of thought,

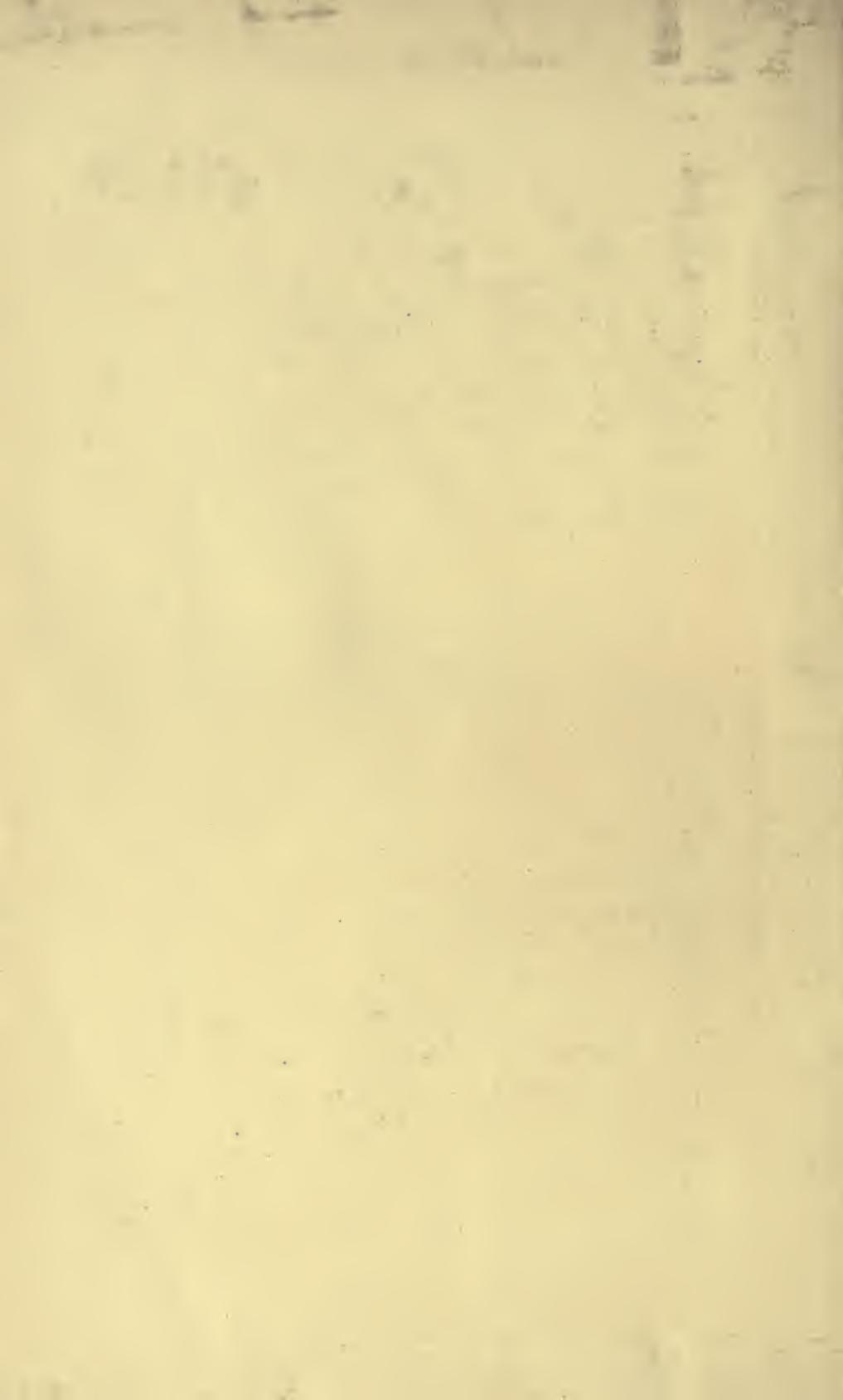
That wait upon their lives.

CROM. It is not so !
The gentlest, noblest Prince in Christendom
Came from a peasant stock. The Son of God
Was chosen from the base—

CHAR. Enough ! Enough !
For I will reason only with the sane.
Go tell the people whom you represent,
Whose confidence by perjuries you've won,
Their King will not yield up those precious rights
He holds in sacred trust.

CROM. These idle words
Will loose the floodgates of the nation's wrath,
And, like a mighty torrent long pent up,
Sweep from the land this mummery of Kings.

THE END.



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